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AMAZING HEROES



FRANK THORNE from *Red Sonja* to *Ribit*
The first full-length interview with the wizard of comics

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THE MAGAZINE OF NEWS & CRITICISM



**IN-DEPTH
INTERVIEW**

Dave Stevens

**UNSEEN
ART**

**PLUS:
THE FINEST
NEWS,
REVIEWS
AND
FEATURES
IN THE
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DUR COVER: An original drawing by Frank Thorne. Moonshine McJugs and Barf McBuns © Playboy Magazine, all others © Frank Thorne. How many characters can you name? A better question: can you find Frank?



EDITORIAL

In the choice of a horse and a wife, a man must please himself, ingoring the opinion and advice of friends.—George Whyte-Melville, Riding Recollections.

Read "DC Notes" pg. 4. Very laudable—but "Piranha"? Not a name to quell creators' fears, and it implies the main line doesn't follow these commandments, I gotta call Mark. Holy wars are the bloodiest.

Now, Y'know, I'm sick of the word *GLUT!* Even more than *hot*.

Who coined *glut*? Either a retailer (claiming money problems) or a publisher (to eliminate competition). I can't see a true fan saying "There's too many comics to chose from." Yes, I've said, "I can't afford every comic each month." But I didn't buy every comic each month anyway. Feel that manipulation?

Without this "glut," would we have *The Elementals*, *Critters*, or *Concrete*? Sure there's the bad side: the New Universe, those asinine animal comics, and so on, but I don't want them gone. I don't want other people's pleasures taken away from them. I'm not Jerry Falwell.

To quote a flyer from my comic subscription service: "The ever-growing monster seems to be finally getting under control. . . . We have significantly cut the number of black & white titles by eliminating those with minimal order and minimal quality (sometimes known as dreck!)." Dreck by whose standards? Imagine a gallery in 16th century Italy: "I'm sorry Raffaello Sanzio. There's a glut, we cannot show your paintings." Who was dreck? Mantegna? Pollaiuolo? Ghirlandajo? The truly bad artists have probably long faded from history's selective memory. As will the bad black and whites—without any help. I cross my fingers and hope quality will out.

I'm looking at this wealth of comics titles as a renaissance, with a promising future, thanks, perhaps, to such things as *Piranha Press*. The problem is: am I gonna be able to get them? KEVIN DOOLEY

Next issue: A Blackthorne overview; Gerry Jones' last Comics in Review; part 2 of Doc Decker's Dr. Werthan column; and Coming Distractions for the whole month of August!

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NEWS

Marvel Notes: "Fall of the Mutants"



Zzaxx, wearing a Mr. Bodybuilder power crown, in Marvel's six-issue *Spellbound*

MUTANT NEWS: Another major shakedown will occur in the Marvel mutant books, beginning in September. *X-Men* #225, *X-Factor* #24, and *New Mutants* #59 will initiate the "Fall of the Mutants" storyline. At the end of the "Fall" story, which involves the possible destruction of the whole Marvel multiverse, the X-Men will be hailed as heroes, X-Factor will lose their secret identities, and a New Mutant will die. (Marvel has not indicated whether "Fall" is to be taken in the sense of "Autumn"—since the series runs from September to November—or "Defeat," or maybe both.)

Although the storylines will be running parallel, there will be no cross-overs to keep track of—but four other, non-mutant titles will tie in: *Hulk* #340, *Power Pack* #35, *Captain America* #339, and *Daredevil* #252—all shipping in October and November.

And December will see the premiere of a fourth mutant-oriented title, *Excalibur*, by CHRIS CLAREMONT, ALAN DAVIS, and PAUL NEARY.

BI-WEEKLY: *Spellbound*, the new six-issue fantasy series by LOUISE

SIMONSON, TERRY SHOEMAKER, and CARL POTTS, will be appearing bi-weekly—a first for Marvel Comics. Running from September 22 to December 1, the series will be available only on the direct-sales market. Every issue will cost \$1.50, except for the final issue, which is a 48-pager selling for \$2.25.

With #4, *Spellbound* becomes part of the Marvel Universe as the New Mutants guest star.

ANNUALS AND BIG ISSUES: *Strikeforce: Morituri* #13 is a double-sized issue, and includes a humorous featurette entitled "How We Make and Destroy Strikeforce Morituri"... *Alpha Flight Annual* #2 is by BILL MANTLO, JUNE BRIGMAN, and BOB McLEOD... *Iron Man Annual* #9 is written DAVID MICHELINIE and drawn by MARK BRIGHT and BOB LAYTON; the same month's *Iron Man*, #225, is a double-size issue, written and drawn by the same (busy) team... And *He-Man, the Movie* is a one-shot written by RALPH MACCHIO and drawn by GEORGE TUSKA and ART NICHOLS.

"Comico Collection"; Ballantine Grendel novel

September will see the release of a special package from Comico Comics: *The Comico Collection*. Each copy of the *Collection* will include ten different Comico comics, a copy of *Comico Attractions*, a Comico poster, a 16-page *Grendel* comic (printed in black, white, and red) by MATT WAGNER & DEAN (Mr. X) MOTTER, all under a black boxed slipcase by Wagner featuring a Grendel design. *The Comico Collection*, which will give readers a chance to sample the whole Comico line for a nominal fee, goes on sale on October 23, 1987.



Grendel all over: a comic, a novel, and a possible movie. Above: issue #12.

Speaking of the popular *Grendel*, Ballantine Books will be releasing a *Grendel* prose novel written by Wagner. The novel will include story lines from the past and present *Grendel* issues, as well as some new, future stories. The book is scheduled for release in the spring of 1988.

Wagner is also busy writing the screenplay for a *Grendel* movie, as well as preparing for the second installment of his *Mage* trilogy, *Mage: The Hero Defined*, which will be serialized as a Comico comic in 1988.

DC Notes: No "General" labels

LABELING CHANGES: DC's controversial decision to rate its comics either "general" or "mature" has been slightly revised, according to a July 1 press release. After a firestorm of criticism from many creators ("we got a little more feedback than we anticipated," DC President/Publisher JENETTE KAHN admitted), DC has decided to drop the "general" label; only those that contain "particularly adult themes and language" will carry a label, specifically "Suggested for Mature Readers." The prestige format (*Dark Knight*, *Green Arrow*) will be exempt from the labeling, however.



Free from DC (Note: crossed-out 50*).

FOCUS: DC is releasing a giveaway magazine at this year's major comics conventions. Entitled *Focus*, the 32-page comic will include previews of *Millennium*, *The Wanderers*, and a feature on *Wasteland* co-creator DEL CLOSE. There will also be late-breaking news, a complete

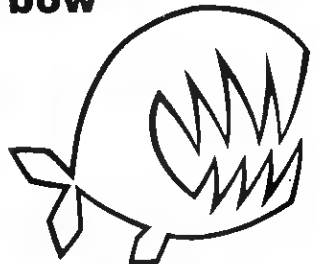


The first of the *Millennium* weeklies.

checklist of DC's summer titles, answers to trivia questions, and a letters page for the final issue of *Legends*. MIKE GOLD is the editor of the comic, which ships in August to specialty stores. JOE STATON and BRUCE PATTERSON did the *Legends* tie-in cover.

PEOPLE: Veteran Caped Crusader artist JIM APARO will be taking over the art on *Batman* with #414; his first several issues will be written by JIM STARLIN... PETER DAVID makes his DC debut on *Star Trek* #48... BILL WILLINGHAM is filling in for JOE STATON as penciller on *Green Lantern Corps* while Staton devotes his energies to *Millennium*... ERIK LARSEN is pencilling the last two issues of *The Outsiders*, both of which are *Millennium* cross-over issues... and BOB ROZAKIS has been promoted from Production Manager to Production Director.

New Piranha Press takes a bow



PIRANHA

P R E S S

DC Comics has announced the formation of a new imprint, Piranha Press. Described in a press release as "the little company with big, sharp teeth," Piranha will be "a haven for creators interested in stretching the medium."

Piranha, which maintains a New York City office separate from DC, will be headed by MARK NEVELOW, a newcomer to comics who says he will have no trouble at all breaking the rules, because he hasn't the faintest idea what they are.

"In its holy war against mediocrity," the release said, "Piranha's tablets will carry six commandments: (1) Thou shalt respect thy creator. (2) Thou shalt reinvent the rules of graphic storytelling. (3) Thou shalt not bow down to stale conventions. (4) Thou shalt not talk down to thy reader. (5) Thou shalt care about the quality of thy work. (6) Thou shalt experiment and be creative at all times."

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Superman's 50th birthday honored



Superman gets his birthday present. DC has announced plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the

first publication of Superman all year long. Among the projected aspects of the celebration:

A year-long exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History;

The release of *Superman IV*;

A documentary special on Superman produced by *Saturday Night Live*'s LORNE MICHAEL and ROSIE SHUSTER, who is a cousin of Superman creator JOE SHUSTER;

And, finally, a big celebration on February 29, 1988—which, as we all know, is his "real" birthday.

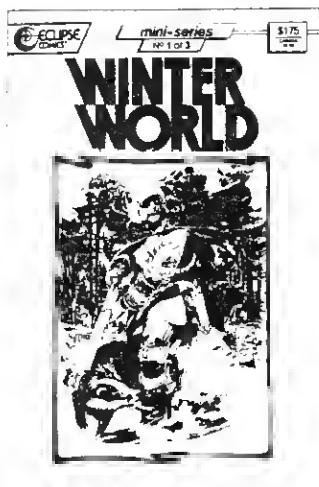
Eclipse: No more Stig's Inferno; Feazell on Zot! #14½

ASTIGMATIC: Eclipse has announced that *Stig's Inferno* #7 will be the last issue of the series, as per the wishes of creator TY TEMPLETON. "For various reasons," Templeton said, "I didn't think I could make it funny any more. I owed it to [Stig] not to do it if I couldn't make it funny." Templeton is currently inking *Booster Gold* and is preparing a special project for Fan-graphics Books' *Critters*.



Matt Feazell's cover for *Zot!* #10½

BACK TO DIMENSION 10½: MATT FEAZELL will be writing and drawing another "half" issue of *Zot!*: *The Adventures of Zot!* in



Old Dixon & new Zaffino on *Winterworld*

Dimension 10½, a.k.a. *Zot!* #14½. Picking up where the back-up feature in *Zot!* #14 leaves off, *TAOZIDTAH* will tell the story of how Antisocialzot becomes his normal lovable self, and the issue features a one-page back-up by *Zot!* creator SCOTT McCLOUD.

NOTES: *Winterworld*, another Eclipse/4Winds series, is being drawn by the Argentinian artist JORGE ZAFFINO. According to editor TIM TRUMAN, Zaffino "could be the next AL WILLIAMSON"; the first issue ships in

September... Responding to rapid sell-outs on some titles, Eclipse has gone back to press on some summer books and is overshipping others. *Prowler* #1 is being overshipped by 25%, while the second issues of *Hotspur*, *Liberty Project*, *Lost Planet*, and *Axa* will be over-



Stevens cover for new *Twisted Tales* #1

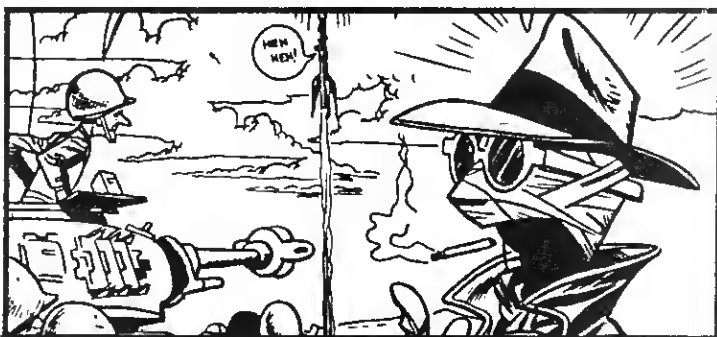
shipped by 20%... *Twisted Tales* #1 (new series) will feature stories drawn by RICK STASI and JIM MOONEY, SCOTT (*It's Science*) SAAVEDRA, and HENRY (*Dinosaur Rex*) MAYO; the \$3.95 48-page comic, which leads off with a DAVE STEVENS cover, goes on sale in late September. ●

Aniverse moves to new company



RANDY ZIMMERMAN and SUSAN VanCAMP's *Tales of the Aniverse* is moving from Arrow Comics to a new publisher, Weebee Comics, in August. At that time, the title will start over again with #1. The publisher promises "a tighter, easier to follow storyline," and yes, there will be a "Fact Files" section to clue in new readers as to what's going on. ●

Get Lost! found: 1954 Satire comic

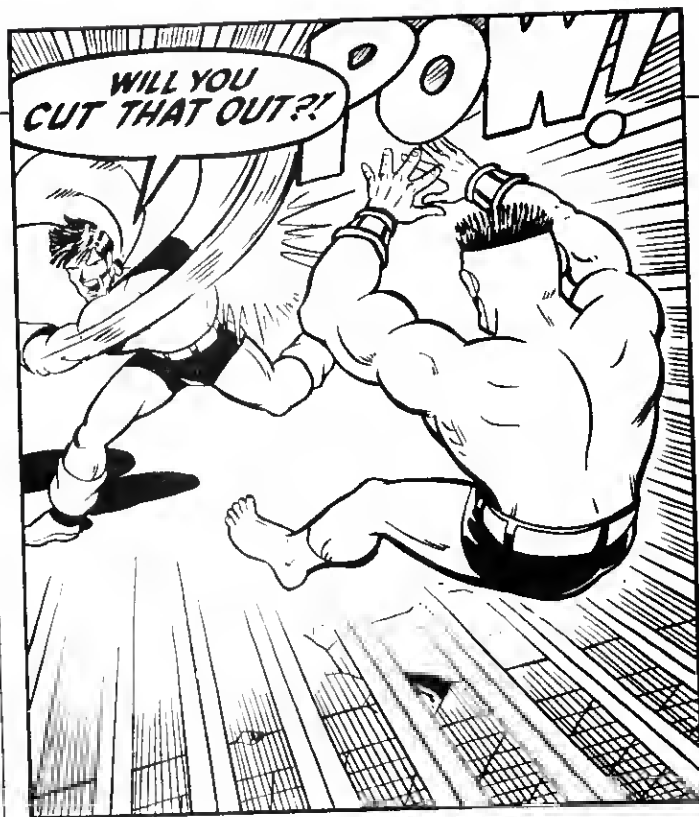


Andru and Esposito's "The Invisible Mr. Mann" from the original *Get Lost!* #2.

A humor comic from 1954, *Get Lost!*, will be reprinted by the New Comics Group early this fall. Originally created by ROSS ANDRU and MIKE ESPOSITO, the three-issue series appeared from Mikeross Publications. Several of the stories were reprinted during the '70s in Marvel's *Aargh* comic.

Get Lost includes satires on *The*

Thing, *I The Jury*, Flash Gordon, Robin Hood, and the Invisible Man, as well as a four-page parody of EC Comics' "The Sewer Keeper," drawn by "Sickley." Although it was Andru and Esposito who did most of the artwork for the stories, other contributors included such notables as HARRY HARRISON and TONY MORTELLARO. ●



“Beat ‘Em Up. Move ‘Em Out.”

PERSPECTIVE

by Shaun McLaughlin

[I stated this before we hired a promo manager with the same name.—KDJ]

An interesting comic-book kind of thing happened to me the other day: I had my life threatened.

I don't want to say that the guy doing the threatening was serious, but if I were bleeding in the gutter, he could be counted on to give me a couple of extra kicks. That's just the kind of guy he was. It occurred to me, after the fact (during the fact I was too busy trying to figure out what to do), that this was the sort of thing that happens with fair regularity in comics. That is: people are faced with physical violence. On the other hand, it's not something that comes up in everyday conversation. I started to think about what effect my four-color fantasies have had on me and how they colored this particular adventure in suburbia.

In some way, comics appeal to us because they represent a fairly neat, well-ordered world where the triumphs outweigh the defeats. They are escapist literature at heart, power fantasies. Siegel and Shuster created the ultimate power fantasy. Lee and

Ditko made it a bit deeper. Miller twisted it. Moore makes us question it. But power fantasies nonetheless. Even in *Watchmen*, it's up to the flawed heroes to save the world. And the world is most often saved in the obligatory fight scene.

So, after having spent most of my twenty-eight years firmly entrenched in these nose-bashing approaches to creative problem-solving, how did I react to the situation above?

I was scared.

I don't mean startled or frightened. I mean *scared*. Perhaps some of you aren't familiar with this emotion. Your heart does an impression of Gene Kruppa on "Sing, Sing, Sing." Your palms perspire. So do your arm pits and you're so aware of everything that you notice the moisture running down the sides of your chest. Your anal sphincter prepares to release breakfast in case you have to make a quick run for it (otherwise known as "scared shitless"). The room becomes very, very warm.

So what did I do?

I thought. I listened and tried to talk. He had good reason to be angry. I had good reason to stand my ground. Without going into details,

it was the kind of situation that often winds up on the six o'clock news with color footage of blood spattered walls. So I talked through it. Not out of it, through it. I was scared—and angry and waiting. I wanted something to happen. Wanted to release the adrenalin. Wanted the fight. And I talked, knowing that the possibility existed that not only would I not see the next sun rise, but it was a fifty-fifty proposition that I wouldn't witness the next sweep of the Timex second-hand.

So maybe you're thinking that this guy's a coward. That I was just too afraid. Go ahead. I think that about myself sometimes. Then I remember that I used to make my living as a stunt-man and fell off roofs on a daily basis (I've got the knees to prove it). I'm not your basic fanboy, swilling Pepsi and chomping Twinkies while vidding Marcross. I bench well in excess of 200, study martial arts and used to live in a neighborhood of Brooklyn populated by the original cast of "West Side Story."

So what was I afraid of? The violence. The thing that makes most comics go 'round. I didn't want my trachea driven into my spine and I didn't want to side-kick his knee-cap into something resembling a shattered piece of tableware. One would have killed me and the other would have crippled him.

What I'm saying in this amazingly roundabout fashion is that one of the major things any entertainment medium is supposed to do is to make you *feel*. I can't remember anything resembling the fear I felt being represented in a comic, yet they are often violent. Very rarely do our heroes even so much as wink and nod at fear. Only a psychotic doesn't get scared. Anybody remember the wonderful scene where Hal Jordan couldn't get hired as a test-pilot because he was a man without fear? *Daredevil* is a book where violence has been questioned. The first fight we see in *Watchmen* is when the characters are literally backed up against a wall.

I don't want violence in comics abolished. I buy and read them, so I obviously get something from them, and from the fight scenes. I'll look at them in a different way from now on and I'll be happy to have that insight. Maybe I'd just like to see the good guys question the nose-bashing a bit more.

After all, while I'm glad I reacted to my situation the way I did, it would've felt really good to bash his nose in.



TOP OF THE NEWS

SPECIAL ISSUE TEAMS MR. MONSTER WITH
AIRBOY, THE HEAP, AND VALKYRIE!

PAGE 9

Bruce Jones Anthologies Replace Terror, Encounters

Popular Eclipse Titles Conclude This Summer

Fans of Eclipse's horror and science fiction anthology titles will witness a changing of the guard as summer draws to a close this year. *Tales of Terror* and *Alien Encounters* will end their successful runs to be replaced by Bruce Jones' *Twisted Tales* and *Alien Worlds*.

"When Bruce left comics after the collapse of Pacific, Eclipse picked up the remaining issues of his popular anthology books," recalls Eclipse editor-in-chief Cai Yronwode. "Then we created our own books to fill that gap in the marketplace. Now that Bruce is back, we're happy to have *Twisted Tales* and *Alien Worlds* back as well."

"They're really different animals," says Fred Burke, comparing the Eclipse and Bruce Jones titles. "I wrote and edited for *Alien Encounters* and *Tales of Terror*. The stuff was often rougher, more explicit. We also tried to make room for new talent, for different styles. Bruce's short stories are more sophisticated, more psychological in scope—and it just so happens that's what the fans are really screaming for."

Tales of Terror #13 closes out that series in July with contributions by Chuck Dixon, Karl Walter, Kim DeMulder, Tim Truman, Ron Wagner, Fred Burke, Graham Nolan, Ron Fortier, Glen Johnson, and Jim Sinclair. *Alien Encounters* #14 follows in August and features the work of John Bolton, Jack Butterworth, John Ridgeway, Chuck Dixon, Tom Wimbish, Beppe Sabatini, Graham Nolan, Eric Dinehart, Tom Lyle, and Romeo Tanghal.

Jones' new books will appear bi-annually in the 48 page, squarebound, Baxter format popularized by *The Dark Knight*. "Of course, fan reaction and Bruce's workload will determine whether we change the frequency or format of the books," says Yronwode.

A Dave Stevens cover kicks off *Twisted Tales* #1, which retails for \$3.95 and ships September 29. *Alien Worlds* #1 is scheduled to ship December 29.



Airboy Meets Mr. Monster This August

Gilbert Scripts Special Novella

Readers who have been clamouring for more Eclipse crossovers will find their appetites temporarily satiated in August when Mr. Monster, the Heap, Airboy, and Valkyrie join forces in "The Cafe at the End of the World." Michael T. Gilbert's powerful story of wasted talent, lost creativity, and suicidal despair begins as the back-up in *Airboy* #28 and concludes one week later in the full-length *Airboy/Mr. Monster* Special #1.



THIS IS FIT TO PRINT NUMBER 167. For further details, I recommend Nicholas Pileggi's book, *WiseGuy*.

"BUSTING OUT": In the shadowy world surrounding organized crime, legitimate and semi-legitimate businesses exist as fronts for the laundering of money and the disposal of stolen swag. Many of the supposedly legitimate establishments are also covered used to run a scam whereby an entrepreneur can combine the network of credit offered in our open society with the underworld of black marketing. Establishing what seems to be a profitable and upright business is often just the prelude to deliberately destroying it through a process known as "busting out." Here's how it works.

A restaurant owner with criminal ties (or a criminal who may run the restaurant as a side-line) establishes a line of credit with legitimate suppliers of food products, in particular expensive ones such as frozen shrimp, steaks, and caviar. Like just about everybody in America, he manages to get thirty day credit before he must pay his bills. Each month, however, he sells a bit of the food he's bought on the black market, where he gets about half its value. Of course, this leaves him with virtually no profit, so he starts to string his supplier along by not paying on time. Says he's had a bad month. Says his employees are stealing from him. Says he's behind now but he'll catch up real soon, honest.

If the supplier kicks, the guy may have to pay interest on his unpaid balance, but that doesn't bother him, because what he is doing here is not simply ripping off the supplier for a few bucks. He's actually attempting to find out exactly how far the supplier will extend his credit—in preparation for a much more profitable "bust out" at a later date.

What's the supplier to do? If he cuts the guy off, he'll never get his shrimp and steaks back, and he'll never see his money either. So gradually, a bit at a time, he starts carrying the restaurant owner along for 45 day credit, 60 day credit, even 120 day credit if the guy keeps on paying interest on his back balance and seems sincere, contrite and humble.

Of course, no restaurant buys all its food from a single supplier, so while this is going on, the owner is stringing dozens of suppliers off, leaving each one to the limit, to the magic point where they threaten to cut him off. He always pays just enough to keep from being cut off, though, because he is orchestrating a "bust out," and that takes good timing and lots of advance planning to work well. So he's paying some suppliers on net thirty, some on 60 with interest, some on 120 with interest—whatever terms he can arrange with each one. In this way he may handle three hun-

dred thousand dollars' worth of food on credit every month.

Then, when all the suppliers are stretched to their respective breaking points, the restaurant owner begins the "bust out." He's set up for black market sales at deeply discounted prices for the tons of food he can buy on credit. Even if he sells a dollar-fifty bag of frozen shrimp for ten cents, he's made a ten cent profit, so toward the end of a "bust out," stuff is going out his back door just as fast as it's coming in the front. Customers are even told, "Sorry, we're all out of shrimp," because selling these foods on the black market can be more profitable than cooking them and serving them for individual retail sales to customers, no matter how hungry the customers may be.

Eventually the guy's credit will run out and he won't get any more food, but by then it's too late for the suppliers to reclaim their merchandise—there are too many steaks or shrimp in the freezer, too many jars of caviar in the pantry. They've all been sold out the back door, and that three hundred thousand dollars' worth of merchandise acquired on credit has become thirty thousand dollars in cold, hard, unexchangeable profit. In one month.

As soon as the suppliers cut him off, the restaurant owner declares bankruptcy. His assets are negligible—a few tables and chairs. If he's really savvy, he'll arrange for a "bust out" of these pieces of equipment and store them somewhere until he can start a new restaurant under another name. Sometimes a particularly enterprising restaurant owner will even burn his own building down for the insurance money, after secretly looting it of all valuable property. Protected by the lenient bankruptcy laws of this nation, he then proceeds to hang his head in shame and vows to "make good" in a new restaurant just as soon as he can get credit with his suppliers.

Now you may ask yourself, why doesn't somebody blow the whistle on a "bust out"? Well, human greed answers that. If other restaurant owners can buy black market shrimp at ten cents on the dollar, they aren't going to squeal...and in some cases this sort of stuff is sold directly to retail customers in open-air venues such as flea markets. Nobody has called the cops on a twenty cent steak yet—and nobody ever will.

"BUSTING HEADS": Last you read the above and think it's the perfect blueprint for a life of crime, I should warn you that suppliers of frozen shrimp, steaks and caviar don't take kindly to being "busted out" by a restaurant owner, and with no legal recourse against a carefully staged bankruptcy, they occasionally take matters into their own hands. Sometimes they hire a bunch of pinging-negs, go down to the restaurant and kick the owner's teeth down his throat. This is called "busting heads." Here's how it works.

"I've been a follower of Michael's work since he lived in Austin years ago," says editor Fred Burke, "and this story is, in my opinion, his finest. Sure, the Wrath and Mr. Monster are great comedic characters, and Michael's wit is razorsharp, but he's capable of some truly dramatic storytelling as well. This novella showcases Michael's darker, more human side."

The story begins when the Heap finds his way to the Cafe Oblivion, where an old man sits and drinks, thinking over his career as a Golden Age ghost artist. Once, long ago, he had dreamed of creating his own character, but a lifetime later all he has done is uncredited work on a vast array of comics, including *Airboy* and *Air-Fighters*. Now these characters gather round him—the heroes versus the villains—for the final battle, the battle for his life, his soul.

"It's the longest story I've ever done, says Gilbert, "and one of the strongest. It's a Mr. Monster story with some teeth to it. I wanted to do a story that was more serious, more poignant...to present a microcosm of life for a cartoonist, particularly during the dark ages before creator's rights."

The *Airboy/Mr. Monster Special* is a fitting end to Mr. Monster's three year run at Eclipse. Although fan support has been extremely gratifying, retailers underestimated the salespower of the critically acclaimed Mr. Monster. The series concluded with issue #10.

"This special, with its direct tie-in to *Airboy* #28, should be one of our better sellers in August," says circulation manager Sean Deming. "It will have the added push of Mr. Monster's devoted following, as well as the increased sales all our cross-overers experience."

Airboy #28 is a \$1.25 Mando book shipping August 18. *Airboy/Mr. Monster Special* #1 is \$1.75 Baxter book and ships August 25.



MR. MONSTER TM AND © MICHAEL T. GILBERT

SHIPPING

ECLIPSE COMICS

SHIPPING JUNE 16, 1987

FLOYD FARLAND

KAMUI #3

MR. MONSTER #10

PORTIA PRINZ #4

Heading this time by TIM MARKIN. To see YOUR name in boldface type and your art or lettering here, make Fit logos 8 1/2 inches wide by 3 inches deep and send 'em to Catherine Yronwode, p.o. box 1099, Forestville, Calif. 95436.

FIT TO PRINT #1987, CATHERINE YRONWODE



TOP OF THE NEWS

Airmaidens Teams Dixon, Elmore

"Sell-Out Summer" Begins

PAGE 10

Sell-Out Summer Forces Eclipse Back To Press On Many Titles

Manga, Reid Fleming, Scout, Valkyrie Vanish From Nation's Specialty Stores

June may be just the tip of the iceberg in what some retailers are already calling "Eclipse's Sell-Out Summer." Underestimating the demand for Eclipse titles, many retailers have been caught short on the new Eclipse International/Viz Comics line of biweekly manga translations, as well as cult hit *Reid Fleming* and perennial favorite *Scout*. Even high orders on *Valkyrie #1* didn't prevent a sell-out on the latest *Airboy* spin-off.

"We're going back to press on *Kanna #1-3*, *Mai #1-2*, *Area 88 #1-2*, and *Reid Fleming #1-2*," says publisher Dean Mulaney. *Miraclemans #11* has also gone back to press, but *Scout #18-19* and *Valkyrie #1* will probably remain out of print. "All of our other titles remain in print and are available for reorders," he says. "We are trying to accommodate these huge fluctuations in retailer demand by going back to press whenever possible. Obviously, that's much easier on black and white titles than on our color books. All second printings will be marked as such on the inside front cover."



TM and © David Boswell

"Eclipse has always taken a conservative policy toward printing overruns," says Mulaney. "We'll overprint by several thousand to make sure we can take care of our readers. Usually that's enough extra copies." A warehouse full of printer overruns was one of the factors contributing to Pacific's demise three years ago, and a more conservative approach has served Eclipse well. Lately, however, with retailer dollars at a premium, many orders have come in very low, only to sell out almost immediately when the books actually hit the specialty store shelves.

"Retailer dollars may be tight as we came off the bizarre black and white glut of last year," says Eclipse circulation manager Sean Deming, "but summer has hit, and the fans have got extra income they want to spend." Deming is seeing a huge increase in the number of reorders, and he's more than happy to get retailers and distributors the extra copies they're demanding. Retailers should reorder through their regular distribution channels. "Don't take no for an answer," says Deming. "If you don't have official word that a book is sold out, call me personally and I'll see to it that you get the books."

Orders on many new series have come in lower than expected this summer, and Eclipse has set its print runs accordingly. However, *Enhancer*, *Liberty Project*, *Esper*, *Hongnig*, and *Last Planet* are all selling much better in the stores than initial orders might have indicated. "It's frustrating to see a store sell out of these books and then not order more," says Deming. "It goes against all the common sense rules of capitalism."

Two of Eclipse's hottest titles, Timothy Truman's *Scout* and Chuck Dixon and Ryn Randall's *Airboy*, could be selling thousands of extra copies if retailers would just up their orders. "These books have proven themselves time and time again," says editor-in-chief Cat Yronwode. "Retailers just need to order enough copies."



THIS IS FIT TO PRINT NUMBER 168. Time's on my side.

DIDJA KNOW? Things happen so fast around here sometimes that I forget to tell people until it's too late, so here are a bunch of developments you may not have heard before. If they sound too much like hype to you, just skip this part and we'll meet again next week, okay?

CHICAGO CON: Practically the whole 4Winds Tribe will be at the Chicago Con, which may even be history by the time you read this. If you are interested in upcoming info on *Scout*, *New America*, *Swords of Texas*, *The Prowler*, *Strike*, *Winterworld*, *Hotspur* (or even *Airboy*, *Valkyrie*, *Airmaidens* or *Airfighters Classics*, which are not strictly 4Winds books although they have some 4Winds personnel on staff), this is the con to attend. Free sample comics, posters, autographs and the like can also be yours. Just drop by the Eclipse table and say hello.

NOT QUITE SO: Which reminds me: I read in some fanzine the other day that "4Winds is a division of Eclipse Comics." Not quite so. 4Winds is the name chosen by a group of writers and artists for projects on which they own the copyrights, and which they are producing for Eclipse. Some of the people involved in the creation of 4Winds material for Eclipse are Tim Truman, Chuck Dixon, John K. Snyder III, John Ostrander, Tom Lyle, Graham Nolan, Michael Price, Romeo Tanghal, Ben Dunn, Sam Parsons, Ron Courtney, Julie Michel, Tim Harkins, Mindy Elsmann and Karl Waller—and a finer bunch of writers, pencillers, inkers, colorists and letterers cannot be found. But the artistic alliance these folks are part of is not a "division of Eclipse Comics" in the usual sense that phrase implies. In other words, we don't own them. (Another misconception about 4Winds I've heard from some fans is that they produce work independently of our editorial direction; not so. In fact, every 4Winds book has a regular Eclipse editor, whose name is listed in the credits.)

HOTCAKES: Guess you've read by now how quickly our Japanese bi-weekly

"One of the largest problems this industry faces is improper ordering," says Deming. "Many distributors and retailers are ignoring reorders when they order upcoming books. Let's say Retailer A ordered 100 copies of *Airboy #23*. When it comes time to order *Airboy #24* he checks his previous

initial order and orders 100 copies. But he forgets to take into account that he re-ordered 30 copies of *Airboy #23*. His orders on *Airboy #24* should reflect this growth. Reordering takes time. The customer may go to Retailer B for *Airboy #24* if he has to wait to get it. That wait costs Retailer A a sale."

Airmaidens Special To Follow Mini-Series

Hot on the heels of the *Valkyrie* mini-series is *Airmaidens Special #1*, by Chuck Dixon, regular *Airboy* and *Valkyrie* writer, and Larry Elmore, who illustrated the first two-part "Skywolf" story which appeared in *Airboy #8-9*.

The plot of this one-shot takes up where the popular *Valkyrie* mini-series leaves off, but in contrast to the grim and realistic Soviet Union plotline of the Val book, author Chuck Dixon refers to the Special as "a change of pace, with grenades, choppers, and machine guns balanced by bikinis and shopping sprees." Asked to summarize the plot, Dixon chuckles and says, "Cute chicks in helicopters blow things up."

Pressed for details, he explains that *Valkyrie* continues the modeling career she started in the *Valkyrie* series, and her next assignment takes her, Marlene, and the Black Angel to the Caribbean, where they encounter the newest female airfighter, La Lupina, and face danger among the mysterious zombie cultists. Crossovers to the regular *Airboy* series are maintained, as an old *Airboy* villain returns, and La Lupina turns out to be someone we've also seen before in the bi-weekly title.



Asked what adjective best describes Larry Elmore's art on the book, editor Cat Yronwode responded, "Gorgeous."

"Of course, it will sell like hotcakes," says circulation manager Sean Deming. "And with every reorder, we'll be sending out a pitcher of maple syrup."

Airmaidens Special #1 is a full color, Baxter book that retails for \$1.75 and ships in August. Hunt your retailer until it arrives.

Heading this time by **JIMMIE L. ROBINSON** To see **YOUR** name in boldface type and your art or lettering here, make FIP logos 8 1/2 inches wide by 3 inches deep and send 'em to

catherine yronwode, p.o. box 1099, forestville, calif. 95436.

LET TO PRINT "1947 CATHERINE YRONWODE"

coming DISTRACTIONS

JULY 16-31

ARCHIE COMICS

We haven't run these in a bit, so here's the Archies for July; first the 75¢ers: **Archie #352**, **Archie's Pals 'N' Gals #192**, **Archie & Me #578**, **Betty & Me #162**, **Betty & Veronica #5**, (*My fave*!) **Betty's Diary #12**, **Jughead #2**, **Katy Keene #23**, **Laugh #3**.

Here's the \$1.35 digests: **Archie Andrews Where Are You Digest #52**, **Archie Comics Digest #86**, **Jughead Jones Digest -47**

And one at \$2.25:
Betty & Veronica Double Digest #3.

COMICO

Due to a ship date error—not Comico's fault (or mine, honest)—these books were listed last month, but they're really coming out this month. I think. I hope.

□ ELEMENTALS #15

Annihilator returns to engage Vortex in a suspenseful "dogfight" in the skies over Seattle. Now monthly.

Story.....**Bill Willingham**
Art.....**Miehm & Wilson**
[*\$1.50 color comic; ships 7/17*]

□ FATHOM #3

In the mini-series conclusion, Fathom is offered princesshood in the underwater city of Talmira.

Story.....**Lawrence Schick**
Art.....**Thompson & Wilson**
Cover.....**Bill Willingham**
[*\$1.50 color comic; ships 7/17*]

□ FISH POLICE SPECIAL #1

Inspector Gill's almost-but-not-quite origin. Full color! All-New!

Story & Art....**Steve Moncuse**
[*\$1.50 color comic; ships 7/17*]

□ JONNY QUEST #12

"The Song of Space"
The secrets of Dr. Zin's mysterious container are revealed when Jonny, Dr. Quest, and Bandit retrieve it.

Story...**William Messner-Loeb**
Art.**Hempel, Wheatley & Mayer**
[*\$1.50 color comic; ships 7/17*]

□ STAR BLAZERS #2

"Sacrifice"
The final issue and ultimate confrontation with Radnar. At stake: the Argo and its prisoners.

Story.....**Phil Foglio**
Art.....**Rice & Chen**
[*\$1.50 color comic; ships 7/17*]

DC COMICS

□ ACTION COMICS #594

The ramifications of Superman's actions in Qurac. No good deed goes unpunished. Guest Booster Gold.

Story/Art/Cover.....**John Byrne**
[*\$1.00 color comic; ships 8/4; newsstand o/s 8/25*]



□ ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN #434

First of a two-part conclusion of the "Circle" plot began in #427.

Story.....**Marv Wolfman**
Art.....**Ordway & Beatty**
Cover.....**Jerry Ordway**
[*75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/18*]

□ BOOSTER GOLD #22

"I Defeat Aliens with a Little Help From My Friends" with Justice League, Int'l.
Story/Art/Cover....**Dan Jurgens**
[*75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/18*]

□ CAPTAIN ATOM #9

Someone's assassinating everyone involved in Cap's court martial?

Story.....**Cary Bates**
Art.....**Broderick & Smith**
Cover.....**Pat Broderick**
[*75¢ color comic; ships 7/7; newsstand o/s 7/28*]

□ DETECTIVE #580

Two Two-Faces two-time Batman.
Story.....**Mike W. Barr**
[*75¢ color comic; ships 8/4; newsstand o/s 8/25*]

□ DOC SAVAGE #1 (of 4)

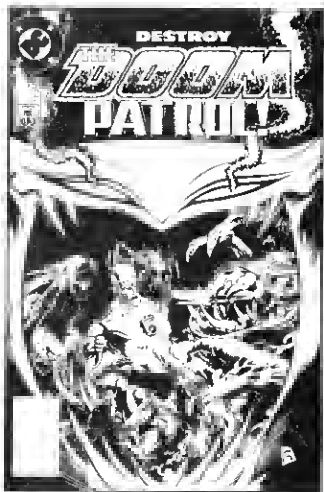
The Man of Bronze returns, but he's not who you think he is. I hope that hasn't changed.

Story.....**Denny O'Neill**
Art/Cover.**Adam & Andy Kubert**
[*\$1.50 color comic; ships 8/4*]

□ DOOM PATROL #2

Kalki's secret. Whatever happened to...another Doom Patroler.

Story.....**Paul Kupperberg**
Art.....**Lightle & Martin**
Cover.....**Steve Lightle**
[*75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/18*]



□ GREEN LANTERN CORPS #218

The red-skinned black sheep of the green corps is back—Sinestro!

Story.....**Steve Englehart**
Art.....**Staton & Farmer**
Cover.....**Staton & Patterson**
[*75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/18*]

□ HAWKMAN #16

Our hero goes berserk. Is he coo-coo?

Story.....**Dan Mishkin**
Art.....**Howell & Garzon**
Cover.....**Richard Howell**
[*\$1.00 color comic; ships 8/4; newsstand o/s 8/25*]

□ INFINITY, INC. #44

Poking out the eye of Ra.

Story.....**R. & D. Thomas**
Art/Cover.....**Argondetti & DeZuniga**
[*\$1.50 color comic on white paper; ships 7/28*]

☐ **NEW TEEN TITANS #37**
Starfire is arrested for Wildebeest's murder, while Nightwing and Raven investigate. She didn't do it, I bet.
Story..... Marv Wolfman
Art..... Barreto & Tanghal
Cover..... Eduardo Barreto
[\$1.75 color comic on white paper; ships 7/28]

☐ **THE PHANTOM STRANGER #2 (of 4)**
As champion of the Lords of Earth, you'd think the Stranger would be up to the task of battling Eclipso. Think again.
Story..... Paul Kupperberg
Art/Cover..... Mignola & Russell
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/18]

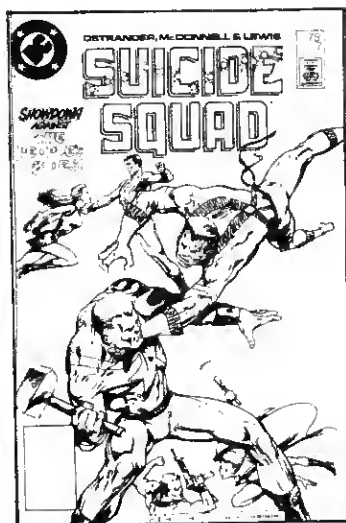
☐ **THE QUESTION #10**
Upon the shoulders of The Question lay the fate of the world. Golly.
Story..... Denny O'Neil
Art..... Cowan & Magyar
Cover..... Cowan & Sienkiewicz
[\$1.50 color comic on white paper; ships 8/4]

☐ **THE SHADOW #4**
Who knows who will kill the Shadow? Not me.
Story..... Andrew Helfer
Art/Cover..... Bill Sienkiewicz
[\$1.50 color comic; ships 7/28]

☐ **SLASH MARAUD #1 (of 6)**
Slash and his *not* your run-of-the-mill gang up against *not* your run-of-the-mill aliens. The power team of Doug Moench & Paul Gulacy together again!
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/28]

☐ **THE SPECTRE #8**
In limbo's nether darkness the Spectre battles Wotan for the life of Zatanna.
Story..... Doug Moench
Art..... Cam Kennedy
Cover..... Mike Mignola
[\$1.00 color comic; ships 7/28]

☐ **SUICIDE SQUAD #7**
There's only one little thing standing in the way of the Suicide Squad leaving Russia: The People's Heroes!
Story..... John Ostrander
Art/Cover..... McDonnell & Lewis
[75¢ color comic; ships 8/4; newsstand o/s 8/25]



☐ **SWAMP THING #66**
The Floronic Man! Constantine! An unexpected visitor!
Story..... Rick Veitch
Art..... Veitch & Alcalá
Cover..... John Totleben
[\$1.00 color comic; ships 7/28]

☐ **SWAMP THING PAPERBACK**
A compilation of issues #21-27, with 15 new pages and a new painted cover by Totleben.
Story..... Alan Moore
Art..... Bissette & Totleben
[\$10.95 trade paperback; ships 8/4]

☐ **TALES OF THE LEGION #353**
Reprinting *LOSH* #28: Star Boy's search for Atmos. He was here a minute ago.
Story..... Paul Levitz
Art..... LaRocque & DeCarlo
[\$1.00 color comic; ships 8/4; newsstand o/s 8/25]

☐ **TEEN TITANS SPOTLIGHT ON #16**
Weather report: Thunder and Lightning at the S.T.A.R. labs.
Story..... Tony Isabella
Art..... Chuck Patton
[75¢ color comic; ships 8/4; newsstand o/s 8/25]

☐ **WARLORD #123**
Battle by eclipse-light: Warlord vs. Redmond.
Story..... Michael Fleisher
Art/Cover..... Duursema & Mandrake
[\$1.00 color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/18]



DARK HORSE COMICS

☐ **BORIS THE BEAR #12**
A surprise birthday party.
Story..... Mike Richardson
Art..... James Dean Smith
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships late July]

☐ **DARK HORSE PRESENTS #9**
"Gene Shock: The Vitruvian Man" by Steve Mattson, Mark Badger, and Art Nichols; "Roma" by John Workman; "Sole Survivors" by Randy Stradley and Tony Salmmons.
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

☐ **GODZILLA #1**
Origin and pin-ups of Raymond Burr.
Story..... Stradley & Bissette
Art..... Bissette & Salmmons
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships late July]

☐ **WACKY SQUIRREL'S SUMMER FUN SPECIAL #1**
A treasure hunt unlike any other.
Story..... Mike Richardson
Art..... Jim Bradrick
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships late July]

ECLIPSE COMICS

☐ **AIRBOY #26**
"Misery Revealed"
I just can't talk about what's in the domain of Misery. I...I just can't. Please don't make me.

Story..... Chuck Dixon
Art..... Ron Randall
Skywolf allies himself with the Yakuza.
Story..... Chuck Dixon
Art..... Lyle & Nelson
[\$1.25 full-color comic; ships 7/21]

☐ **AREA 88 #5**
"The Crossing Point of Solitude"
When Kanzaki ventures into military airspace, he and Kazama's feud over Ryoko might end—forever.
Story/Art..... Kaoru Shintani
[\$1.00 color comic; ships 7/28]

☐ **AXA #2**
"Axa—the Donor"
Somebody wants something from Axa, and it's not what you think (then again, it might be).
Story..... Chuck Dixon
Art..... Enrique Romero
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/28]

☐ **CROSSFIRE #23**
"The Superstar"
A world of twisted rock reality from which there is a lot of different escapes.
Story..... Mark Evanier
Art..... Dan Spigle
[\$2.00 black-and-white comic; ships 7/28]

☐ **DETECTIVES #2 (of 3)**
Adultery, greed, violence, murder, and a few new dance steps. Behind-the-scenes on the movie!
Story..... Don McGregor
Art..... Gene Colan
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/28]



□ ESPERS #7

A turning point for the ESPers—and it's only issue 7!

Story.....James D. Hudnall
Art.....John Burns
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/28]

□ HAND OF FATE #1

A detective and his psychic girlfriend. The detective gives the book its name—Artemus Hand.

Story.....Bruce Jones
Art.....Gerald Forton
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/21]

□ JOHNNY HAZARD #9 & 10

Two more volumes reprinted the Frank Robbins strip from 1951 and 1953.
[\$4.95 black-and-white book; ships 7/28]

□ KAMUI #5

Kamui is attacked by Sayaka, as he tries to leave the island. Hanbei is arrested and tortured.

Story/Art.....Sanpei Shirato
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships 7/21]

□ MAI THE PSYCHIC GIRL #5

Her father battles beast-man; Mai crosses Devil's path alone—or is she?

Story.....Kazuya Kudo
Art.....Ryolchi Ikegami
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships 7/28]

□ THE MASKED MAN #10

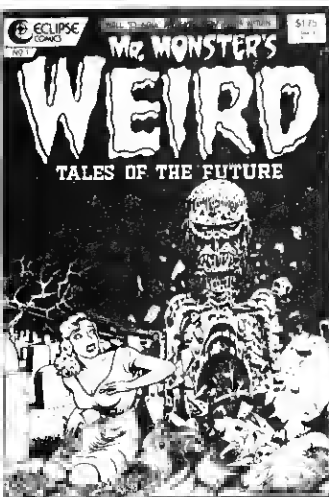
They're back! The Masked Man and Barney help an escaped con see his son for the last time.

Story/Art.....B.C. Boyer
[\$2.00 black-and-white comic; ships 7/21]

□ MR. MONSTER'S SUPER DUPER SPECIAL #8

Wolverton's *Weird Tales of the Future*. Mr. Monster hosts an eerie collection of some of the best Basil Wolverton stories, including "Brain Bats From Venus!"

[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/21]



□ PROWLER #1

Leo Kragg—The Prowler, masked avenger of the '40s is making a comeback and is looking for an apprentice to carry on his unique brand of justice.

Story.....Timothy Truman
Art.....John K. Snyder III
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/21]

□ THE SISTERHOOD OF STEEL: ECLIPSE GRAPHIC NOVEL #12

Grayan invites Boronwe's to join the Sisterhood's assassin section. Takes place after the Epic series—but is "complete unto itself."

Story.....Christy Marx
Art.....Peter Ledger
[72 pg; 8½ x 11; full color; \$8.95 softback; \$14.95 hardcover; \$24.95 signed & numbered hardcover; ships 7/28]

□ VALKYRIE #3 (of 3)

"Trial"

The sentence! The Black Angel in action! Valkyrie by Gulacy.

Story.....Chuck Dixon
Art.....Paul Gulacy
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/21]

□ ZOT! #14

"The Seasons of the Dreams" part II. Pam finds Bobby in the shower...uh...I mean Jenny wonders if Zot was all a fantasy. Now, you know Scott's gonna handle that better than anyone ever has.

Story/Art.....Scott McCloud
[\$2.00 black-and-white comic; ships 7/28]

ENTERTAINMENT PUBLISHING

□ DELTA TENN #3

"Assassins, Inc."

The above group's after Delta; her boyfriend's seeing another woman, and her leather boots get a run.

[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships 7/29]



□ THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. #7

"The Turncoat Affair"

Iliya falls in love with an U.N.C.L.E. receptionist, whose father, a Soviet war hero, stirs up international trouble.

Story.....David M. Lynch
Cover.....Photo!
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships 7/31]

ETERNITY COMICS

□ BLADE OF SHURIKEN #3

The mafia wants Kyoto and the mayor

dead and Chopper's the man to do it. still tracks the killer down.

Story.....Wade Winningham
Art.....Byers & Durham
[\$1.95 black-and-white comic; ships 7/30]

□ CARNAGE #2

A "hero" who makes Rambo look like a cub scout.

Story/Art.....Richard Ferguson
[\$1.95 black-and-white comic; ships 7/30]

□ G.I. MUTANTS #2

The retaking of Alpha 5

Story.....Martin Barkenwald
Art.....Madman
[\$1.95 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

□ THE MIGHTY MITES #2

The Black & White monster. A comics parody or a South Africa statement.

Story.....John Nubbin & Sparky
Art.....Nick Conti
[\$1.95 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

□ NINJA FUNNIES #4

Story.....Ken Sperry
Art.....Dale Berry
[\$1.95 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

FANTACO

□ GORE SHRIEK #2

"The Need for Speed" written by Bill Townsend and drawn by Greg Capullo; "Face in Mirror" and a silent "War" by Rolf Stark.

Cover.....Bruce Spalding Fuller
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

FIRST COMICS

□ THE CHRONICLES OF CORUM #2

"The Queen of the Swords"

A quest! Qoo, what an original idea!

Story.....Mike Baron
Art.....Mignola & K. Jones
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/17]



□ HAWKMOON #2

"The Sword of the Dawn"

Flying to a mystic place via crystal rings. Movie included. Please return the stewardess to her upright position.

Story.....Sallick & Kayanan
Painted Cover....Dave Dorman
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/17]

□ JON SABLE, FREELANCE #53

A mysterious man from Myke's past has business with Sable.

Story/Cover.....Mike Grell
Art.....George Bookner
[\$1.75 color comic; ships 7/17]

GLADSTONE COMICS

□ DONALD DUCK ADVENTURES #1

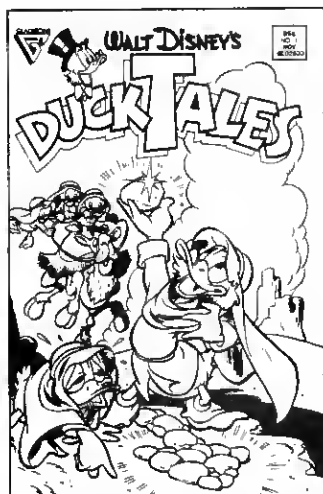
From the oceans to the desert in this first issue: "Isabella" by Dutch artist Ben Verhagen and "Jungle Hi-Jinks" by Carl Barks.

Cover.....Daan Jippes
[95¢ color comic; ships 7/28]

□ DUCK TALES #1

"McDuck of Arabia" by Carl Barks; this book will focus on longer stories, and tie-in with the new animated globe-trotting adventure TV show.

Cover.....Daan Jippes
[95¢ color comic; ships 7/21]



□ MICKEY MOUSE DIGEST #6
"Super Secret Agent" concludes by Paul Murry and Dan Spiggle; extra stories by Bradbury, Hubbard, and Strobl.

Cover.....Daan Jippes
[95¢ color digest-sized; ships 7/21]

□ UNCLE SCROOGE #223
Another classic by Barks with Uncle Scrooge and Gyro, plus a couple of Danish tales.

Cover.....Daan Jippes
[95¢ color comic; ships 7/28]

□ WALT DISNEY'S COMICS & STORIES #524

New Story by Don Rosa! "Li'l Bad Wolf," Mickey and Gyro Gearloose story by Barks.

Cover.....Yep, Daan Jippes
[95¢ color digest; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

GRAPHXPRESS

□ EQUINE #4

Our "intrepid" reporter follows a princess and a barbarian.

Story/Art.....Groat & Konkle?
[\$2.00 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

□ MORPHS #2

John Spiggle's "Adventures of Kitty Malone" continues; Tom Owens's "Star Lizard" continues; Phil Morrissey's "Punk Mutants on Controlled Substances"...you guessed it.

[\$2.00 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

HOT COMICS

□ JOHNNY GAMBIT #4

Story/Art.....Oldham/Jim Brozman
[\$1.95 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

□ SHADOW BLADE #4

Penultimate issue right before the last one.

Story/Art.....Stan Timmons
[\$1.95 black-and-white comic; ships in July]

MARVEL COMICS

□ AVENGERS #285

The Olympian (whoops, can't use that name)...the Norse God War concludes.

Story.....Roger Stern
Art.....J. Buscema & Palmer
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

□ THE BIG CHANGE: THE THING AND THE HULK

The sign says "No Humans" and they mean it! One of the most off-beat stories ever! Teaming up Jim "Thing" Starlin with Berni "Hulk" Wrightson.

[\$5.95 color graphic novel; ships 7/21]

□ CONAN SAGA #6

Reprinting: "The Frost Giant's Daughter," "The Gods of Bal Sageth," "The Thing in the Temple," "The Color of Money."

Stories.....Roy Thomas
Art/Cover.....Barry Windsor-Smith
[\$2.00 black-and-white magazine; ships 7/28]

□ CLASSIC X-MEN #16

Reprinting #107, by Claremont/Byrne, where Phoenix saves the universe. And where did it get her? And: a 15-page Claremont/Bolton back-up on the origin of the Starjammers.

[\$1.00 color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

□ CONAN THE BARBARIAN #200

The Devourer of Souls has a reservation for two for lunch: Conan and Red Sonja. Yum!

Story.....Jim Owsley
Art.....Semeiks & Isherwood
[\$1.50 color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

□ D.P. 7 #13

Waitaminute! What's this New Universe title doing here? I thought they were all...oh, not this one, huh? Why?

Story.....Mark Gruenwald
Art.....Paul Ryan
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]



□ FANTASTIC FOUR #308

The new FF faces a new villain: Fasaud.

Story.....Steve Englehart
Art.....J. Buscema & Sinnott
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

□ G.I. JOE #65

Hasbro has added the Space Shuttle and pilot to its line of toys. Guess who debuts this issue?

Story.....Larry Hama
Art.....Wagner
Cover.....Zeck & McLeod
[\$1.00 color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

□ INCREDIBLE HULK #337

No more Hulkbusters? No more Gamma Base? What's this world coming to?

Story.....Peter David
Art.....Todd McFarlane
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21 newsstand o/s 8/13]

□ IRON MAN #224

Part 2 of the fight against the "C" team...or is it the "B" girls?

Story.....David Michellnie
Art/Cover.....Bright & Layton
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

□ JUSTICE #13

This one, too?! Okay. Maybe. Let's see: "Justice pursues Bonnie & Clyde-like robbers." Nope.

Story.....Clark & Chichester
Art.....Grindberg & Bryant
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

□ MARVEL FANFARE #35

Big Bad Hogan's tries to turn a goat back into a man or see Asgard perish. "Enchanting read!"—Gerry Jones, Amazing Heroes.

Story.....Alan Zelenetz
Art.....Charles Vess
[\$1.50 color comic; ships 7/21]

□ MARVEL SAGA #24

[\$1.00 color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

□ MARVEL TALES #205

Spider-Man & Havok mummify the Living Pharaoh from Marvel Team-Up #69. Spider-Ham by Mellor and Albano.

Story.....Chris Claremont
Art.....Byrne & Villamonte
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

☐ THE 'NAM #12

We see the war through a letter written by Hawkeye...uh...Marks.

Story.....Doug Murray
Art.....Marie Severin
Cover.....Michael Golden
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

☐ PETER PARKER #132

How do you undo the damage done by a madman?

Story.....J.M. DeMatteis
Art/Cover.....Zeck & McLeod
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]



☐ PETER PARKER ANNUAL #7

The Honeymooners in the South of France: they take pictures and decide who'll wear the spandex that night.

Story.....Jim Owsley
Art.....Kupperberg & Fern
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

☐ POWER PACK #33

Two Fallen Angels—Bobby and Warlock—drop in.

Story.....Louise Simonson
Art.....Bogdanove & Barta
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

☐ PUNISHER #4

Nothing's more dangerous than a wounded Punisher.

Story.....Mike Baron
Art.....Klaus Janson
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/20]

☐ SILVER SURFER #5

Still Mantis.

Story.....Steve Englehart
Art.....Rogers & Rubinstein
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

☐ STAR BRAND #10

No information given on the Marvel flyer. Hmm. Could it be that John Byrne is going negate everything next issue?
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

☐ THOR #385

Asgard's floating away? Get my adrift?

Story.....Tom DeFalco
Art.....Ron Frenz
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

☐ TRANSFORMERS #34

Story.....Bob Budlansky
Art.....Akin & Garvey
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

☐ TRANSFORMERS DIGEST #6

Reprintin' #11 & 12.
[75¢ color digest-sized comic; ships 7/28]

☐ X-FACTOR #22

Cameron Hodge is revealed to be bad guy (I never like him anyway).

Story.....Louise Simonson
Art.....Sal Buacema
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

☐ X-MEN #223

Reality War continues; Storm's powers quest continues. I understand the sub-sub-plot of Kitty's pimples is cleared up.

Story.....Chris Claremont
Art.....Gammill & Green
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

MARVEL EPIC COMICS

☐ ELFQUEST #28

Trolls vs Trolls & Elves: scorecards available at box office.

Story.....W. & R. Pini
Art.....Wendy Pini
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

MARVEL STAR COMICS

☐ AIR RAIDERS #1

O is more precious than AU. And \$ is more precious than *. Hasbro tie-in.

Story.....Howard Mackie
Art.....Kelley Jones
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13] * Imagination.

☐ BULLWINKLE & ROCKY #1

Hokey smokes, is return of Moose and Squirrel. Bullwinke invents an invisible ray. "Fractured Fairytale" back-up.

Story.....Dave Manak
Art.....Colon & Roettcher
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

☐ CARE BEARS #13

The fight you've been waiting for: "The Care Bears Meet the Mad Balls!"

Story.....Michael Gallagher
Art.....Post & Edelman
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/28; newsstand o/s 8/20]

☐ MUPPET BABIES #16

Each baby describes Nanny

Story.....Laura Hitchcock
Art.....Marie Severin
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/21; newsstand o/s 8/13]

NOW COMICS

☐ ASTRO BOY #1

Before Transformers—there was Astro Boy (I think. It sounds good.)

Story.....Michael Dimpsey
Art.....Steady & Dunn
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/17]

☐ DAI KAMIKAZE #3

Story/Art...Augustyn/Strazewski
Van Meter/Reising
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/31]

☐ EB'NN #9

Story.....Michael Dimpsey
Art.....Schneider
[75¢ black-and-white comic; ships 7/31]



☐ RALPH SMART #10

Story/Art.....Marc Hansen
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/31]

☐ RUST #2

Story.....Steve Miller
Art.....Statema/Mounta
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/17]

☐ SPEED RACER #2

The World Racing Association may not let Speed racer Cover by Ken Steacy.

Story.....Len Strazewski
Art.....Washington/Thomas/
Holewczynski
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/31]

☐ SYPHONS #7

Story/Art.....Alan Curtis
Inks.....Davis & Reising
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/31]

RENEGADE COMICS

☐ MS. TREE 3-D CLASSIC CRIME #1

Two "Johnny Dynamite's, "Secret Agent" by Pete Moris; Minute Mystery by Collins & Beatty; 3-D cover gallery. 3-D by who else....Ray Zone
[75¢ 3-D comic; ships in July]

☐ 3-D ZONE PRESENTS #6

R-a-a-t F-i-n-k by Ed "Big Daddy" Roth. 3-D by uh.....Ray Zone
[75¢ 3-D comic; ships in July]

VORTEX

☐ MISTER X #12

Story/Art.....Dean Motter/Seth
[75¢ black-and-white comic; ships in July]

BACK ISSUES

#1-3: SOLD OUT!

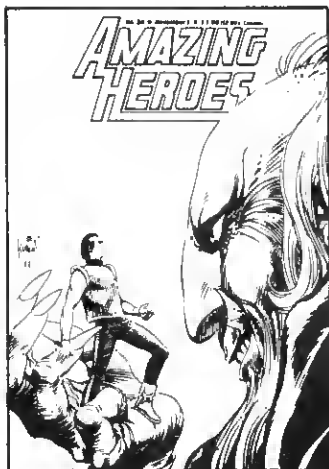
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EDITOR-SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

CARTOONISTS BEWARE!

by Ken L. Jones

As editor of Elsewhere Productions, *Launch!*, it is my pleasure to review a number of presentation packages, submissions, and correspondences in the course of a week. In fact, I find sifting through these missives one of the more interesting of my editorial duties.

Recently in a batch of otherwise intriguing material, I received something so abysmal that I felt compelled to write this article. Another small press publisher called Showcase Publications sent me something called: *The Comics Artists Showcase*. I will not pretend that I was completely ignorant of what this magazine was all about. I remember seeing some pre-publicity for it somewhere, and I even managed to glance at it at a recent C.A.P.S. meeting (that's the local professional cartoonists society here in Southern California).

It wasn't until I had time to sit down and study this thing in the solitude of my office, that I came to realize how disgusted it truly made me. Upon deep reflection, I must publicly encourage people to avoid this publication with great vigor. For

those of you who might never chance upon this publication allow me to elucidate further.

If you can put pen to paper (even marginally) you can be printed in this "comic book." All the publishers ask in return is a mere \$85.00 for one page and "each additional page \$65.00 (four-page limit)." For this fee Showcase will print your work and it is then sent "direct to comic book stores, guaranteed distribution to every company. It is sent directly to those who hire comic book artists (art directors, editors, artists, art buyers, and publishers)."

As one of the aforementioned editors who received this "comic book," I'd like to offer the following comments. The first issue of *The Comic Artists Showcase*, in my opinion, was terrible! If any of the material had been sent to me as a submission I would have rejected it without a doubt. Everyone of the submissions was poorly executed by people who have very little chance of ever seeing print in a professional comic book. Unfortunately, the contributors to this project have dropped a small fortune on a very questionable presentation package. I can't help but feel that the "cartoonists" who spent \$85.00 plus on being showcased in this book could have been money ahead to spend the same amount on stats, manilla envelopes, etc., to submit

the material in a more traditional way.

I'd next like to direct a few observations at this magazine's publisher, Mr. Brian Moore. I think you need to seriously re-think this project. If you want to publish future issues why don't you do the following thing: Hire a panel of professional cartoonists to *screen* the submissions to your magazine. Don't accept anyone who can afford to buy a page just because they can come up with the required fee. Ask yourself the following question: Would I *pay* this individual to cartoon for me? Instead of charging a fee to appear in your magazine, why not split the profits with your creators as other publishers do? It might also be advisable not to accept pin-up pages and/or artwork featuring actionably close facsimiles of such characters as Superman or Batman in future issues.

I have offered the previous observations in the form of constructive criticism, and not as an attack on anyone connected with *The Comics Artists Showcase*. In a field of over six hundred titles, our industry cannot afford to let such dubious projects as this continue unquestioned. I further hope that there will be a public snubbing of this and all other such projects. To paraphrase an ancient Greek aphorism: Cartoonist Beware! ●



The Spawn of Red Sonja

FRANK THORNE

An Interview by Kim Thompson

Most comic book careers have a clearly recognizable beginning and end, but few have as distinct a center as Frank Thorne's. Thorne himself, during the following interview, returns time and time again to the subject of Red Sonja—the comic, the character, the phenomenon—and

her impact on his career is unmistakable.

In the days before the red-headed warrior woman, Thorne labored in the vineyards of comics for close to 30 years, generating page after page of syndicated strips, Gold Key and DC comic books, and illustrations

for magazines. His work did not exactly present a high profile: even when he moved closer to the spotlight by drawing war comics and Korak, Son of Tarzan for DC, he was surrounded by flashier or better-known acts like Joe Kubert and Mike Kaluta.

AUGUST 15, 1987

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All that changed almost overnight in 1974 when Marvel editor-in-chief Roy Thomas, casting around for an artist to draw the new Red Sonja comic, contacted Thorne. As Thorne says in the interview, it was easily the most important phone call of his life. The comic gave Thorne his first shot at high visibility (let's not forget that Marvel was at its peak vis-a-vis DC at the time, usually commanding the entire Top 25 in sales polls); it also tapped heretofore unsuspected reservoirs of creativity and skill.

The Sonja experience snowballed, leading to a stage show, a video presentation, and more. But Thorne eventually began chafing at the bit, and after several years of Sonja madness, left Marvel for Warren, and the redhead for a blonde: Ghita of Alizarr. Ghita, published in the controversial 1984, took all the implicit sex and violence of Sonja and made them raucously explicit. A succession of strips followed, invariably focused around a buxom, lusty woman (and usually with a character modeled after Thorne himself somewhere in the brew): Lann for Heavy Metal, Danger Rangerette for the National Lampoon, and Moonshine McGugs for (inevitably) Playboy.

Thorne spent most of the mid-'80s working on a Ghita movie deal that never materialized. But now he's back to comics, with a new series: Ribit!, to be published as a four-part mini-series by Comico in the spring of '88. The explicit sex is gone; it's a PG-rated standard color comic; and, most astonishingly of all, the heroine has a small bust—but it's unmistakably Thorne through and through.

Thorne is a genial and expansive interview subject—I was about an hour and a half into the interview before I had to fall back on prepared questions, and I nearly wore out my fingers typing "[laughs]." He speaks with the same enthusiasm as he draws, and I hope this interview

conveys his free-wheeling charm.

I spoke to him over the phone in early July. The interview was transcribed by Thom Powers (thanks!); I went over it for some basic editing, and Frank did the final, thorough copy-editing. —KIM THOMPSON

AMAZING HEROES: I went through our files and I couldn't find any major interviews with you.

FRANK THORNE: I don't think there have been any. This is probably the first one other than the text in the Lann and Ghita books.

AH: Well, why don't you give me an overview of your career?

THORNE: It's almost 40 years ago, to the week, that I found the Art Career School and Art Career School found me. That late and noble institution was at the top of the old Flatiron building in Manhattan. And 40 years later, through insurrections, droughts, plagues, riots, here I am [laughs]!

AH: Something of an achievement there.

THORNE: As a matter of fact, I started pencilling love comic books when I was about 18. Joe Archibald gave me my first job at Standard Comics, which is no longer in existence. It was my first year at school. I met Hy Eisman at ACS and we've been friends ever since. We celebrated last weekend, when Hy and Adri's daughter Merle was married. There's a long run for you. Hy's drawing and writing the *Katzenjammers*, but he's done a lot of well-known features: *Kerry Drake*, *Archie*, *Little Iodine*. As teenagers Hy and I were lucky. We knew exactly what we wanted—a career in comics. There's still a lot of young ones around today that want a career in comics. On it goes. The irony is that the pay's about the same as when Hy and I began [laughs]. But today there are fans and fanzines as fringe benefits. We didn't have organized fandom back in the '40s

and '50s. Maybe it's just as well. There was a school farther down 23rd Street that taught comics, but Hy and I chose ACS over The Cartoonist's and Illustrator's School.

AH: Was that more of a commercial art school?

THORNE: Yes. It offered practical nuts-and-bolts stuff. Hy and I and the late Al Kilgore were the only students in the school who wanted to do comics very bad. By the way, The Cartoonist's and Illustrator's School became the School of Visual Arts; it went on to glory. I wish I could say that about us [laughs]. While I was still at ACS I started writing and drawing a strip for a local newspaper called *The Illustrated History of Union County*, which paid enough for Marilyn and me to get married. I met Marilyn the week after I met Hy. She is the most loving and patient among women. We're still married—another long run! We have four children and five grandchildren. At 21 I contracted to do *Perry Mason* for King Features. It was a daily and Sunday strip. Meanwhile, I was still playing trumpet in area jazz bands. The demands of producing *Perry* forced me to leave the horn behind. Then I left behind *Perry* as well.

AH: That's when you went to *Western*?

THORNE: Yes. See, [*Perry Mason* creator] Earle Stanley Gardner and old man [Randolph] Hearst were very good friends and I was told that was the only reason they kept *Perry* going. When Hearst died they dropped the strip and I was out on the tarmac. Then I went over to Western Printing, which published the original Dell comics. I did *Flash Gordon*, *Jungle Jim*, *Green Hornet*, and *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*—all bad, Kim.

AH: You spent about 15 years there, intermittently?

THORNE: Sort of. I left in '57 and came back in '64 to draw *Mighty Samson*. The comics were published

One of the Dr. Guy Bennett dailies Frank did from 1957 to 1962: direct competition with Rex Morgan.



"If you ever see anyone using a phone in my work, it's always perfectly accurate."

under the Gold Key logo, but it was still Mighty Western. I did seven issues of Smelly Sam. I did a couple of mildly satisfying things under the old Dell logo. Two movie books: *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *Moby Dick*, which were derivative but pretty solid. When I'm forced to go back and look at my old stuff I'm reminded of how dreadful it was. It helps in looking at the output of the new generation. The work Alex Toth did for Dell in the '50s is legendary. His *Zorro* blew me away. The famous portrait artist, Raymond Everett Kinstler, did a western strip called *Silvertip* very much in the style of James Montgomery Flagg. Ray was very close to Flagg. So I left Dell in '57 to do the daily and Sunday *Dr. Guy Bennet* strip for Art Lafave. The Lafave Syndicate, which was just Art, had built its fortunes on the genius of Cliff McBride and his *Napoleon*. Art told wild stories about Cliff and his problems with the sauce. So after the good doc's demise I'm back at Gold Key with Sam and a lot of the *Twilight Zone* stuff.

AH: *Stuff like Boris Karloff.*

THORNE: Right. It was at Gold Key that I met Fred Fredericks. Hy and Fred are my oldest buddies in the craft. Fred was doing wonderful things for GK. *The Munsters*, *Mr. Ed*... he's so fast it's amazing. He's done *Mandrake* for 20 years, along with *Rebel* for *Scholastic Magazine*. Now he's doing inking for Marvel as well! Amazing. It was a good bunch at GK. Wally Wood, Al Williamson, George Evans, Mel Crawford, Russ Manning, Jesse Marsh... For some reason fandom has not taken note of that output.

AH: *Well, fandom hasn't really taken good note of Dell and Western.*

THORNE: What is the reason?

AH: *I guess they have the image, especially later, of doing mostly funny-animal and humor books, which fandom isn't really into—more's the pity. Mark Evanier estimated that they'd probably published half the comics in the U.S.*

THORNE: Come to think of it, there weren't many super-heroes.

AH: *Well, you're not really fond of super-heroes, are you?*



Frank did *Dr. Guy Bennett* between two tenures at Dell comics.

THORNE: No. I don't think I'd be good at it because I don't have any real interest in the genre. Illustration intrigued me, and I had done a lot for the *Golden* magazine and the phone company. You know, the phone book covers with the ladies holding phones. If you ever see anyone using a phone in my work, it's always perfectly accurate.

AH: *No wasted experience. Of course, in the last half-dozen straight strips you've done, there haven't been any phones at all.*

THORNE: [Laughs] That's right. Well, I guess I've left my mark in the rendering of phones. Anyway, I went over to DC in the late '60s.

AH: *I have '68 here.*

THORNE: They gave me *Tomahawk* and some war books: *Hunter's Hellcats* and *Enemy Ace*. Then came, *Hawk*, *Son of Tomahawk* and *Korak, Son of Tarzan*. That was during the Filipino invasion. Those wonderful Filipino artists, Rudy Nebres and Tony DeZuniga...

AH: *Alex Nino, Redoulo...*

THORNE: They were really fine craftsmen. They were like munchkins. They even had munchkin names. A guy with a name like Ruben Yandoc can't be all bad [laughs]. The Filipinos came, and some of 'em went back. It's another one of those insurrections I mentioned.

AH: *I think Korak was the first thing I really noticed your work in.*

THORNE: I did a lot of "Sons of."

And then came Red Sonja, daughter of death.

AH: *Ah, yes. There's a very clear division in your career: Before Red Sonja and after Red Sonja. That's sort of the watershed.*

THORNE: Exactly.

AH: *How did you get the assignment?*

THORNE: That was just out of the blue. The phone rang one day and it was Roy [Thomas]. I don't think Roy and I had ever met. I had never worked for Marvel before. Why I was chosen...

AH: *Is that before or after you did the work for Seaboard?*

THORNE: That was after Seaboard.

AH: *Because it strikes me in retrospect that you were just so identified as a DC artist that no one at Marvel figured you'd be interested. And once it was noticed that you did Son of Dracula et al. for Seaboard, people may have figured you were an open market.*

THORNE: That's probably the answer. I neglected to mention Seaboard. There was some good guys freelancing for them, too. They even had Neal [Adams] doing some covers and things. Ernie Colon did a lot of nice things for Seaboard.

AH: *Did you read Jeff Rovin's article on Seaboard in the recent Comics Journal?*

THORNE: Yes, and it was right on. Jeff had written "Lawrence of Arabia," which really ignited me. I



Before Red Sonja Frank had never really drawn women. Above: the red she-devil meets magic with steel.

thought it was a great idea. I never knew why they didn't continue the strip.

AH: Did any of those ever appear?

THORNE: Just one. It was the only one we did. There were other things done in that style. At that period I started doing wash drawings with ink. In the later stuff for *Playboy* I used the same technique with color, using the white of the paper for highlighting, as with watercolor. Working with Larry Lieber, one of the editors, was the best. Larry is Stan Lee's brother. The lesser known, but equally talented Lieber. Larry is a sweetheart, and so is Stan. Most everybody agrees on that point.

Coming back to Sonja, and that fateful day that I came in to the Marvel offices and met Roy and Stan. I fell instantly and passionately in love with Sonja. I almost flew home with the script. Oddly, I'd never drawn ladies all that much before the redhead.

AH: You have since, though.

THORNE: I haven't drawn anything else [laughs]! The cover [on this issue of *AH*] should be called "The Spawn of Red Sonja." She changed everything for us and flung Marilyn and me into a wonderful kind of whirlwind, which continued

"I suppose Red Sonja uncorked some sort of repressed sexual fantasy inside me...The concept captivated me."

through '78. After that excitement came even greater times.

AH: It's interesting that Marvel chose to use an artist and a writer they'd never used before at the same time.

THORNE: I don't really know. Roy was the editor. Clair Noto wrote a lot of them, and Bruce Jones wrote a couple. Wendy Pini wrote one, a very good one.

Anyway, when Sonja's book went past four issues, something which had never happened to a Marvel heroine, exciting things began to happen. Sonjacon was planned. It was to be the first major con in honor of only one character. It was risky, but it was a big success. We were covered by three TV stations and got a lot of print coverage. In

anticipation of the con, a great and gorgeous and talented lady named Angelique Trouvere and I did a schtick in a ginmill in Sayreville, N.J. Angie dressed as Sonja, and I was in civvies. The wizard suits and the hillbilly and space outfits came later. The joint was filled with Sonja fans and a few bewildered customers. It was, in fact, the first *Wizard and Red Sonja Show*. I recall that Gene Colan was in the audience, he'd come up to eyeball Angie, like everybody else. Sonjacon featured the famous *Red Sonja* lookalike contest, which was important because it brought together a number of young nubile aspirants who later took part in the shows. It was a splendid, electric, innocent time. We all volunteered for the love of Sonja. There was a spirited competition among the girls. Each wanted to be the principal Sonja performer. That, of course, was Wendy Pini. Later followed the free plane tickets and hotel rooms as we did the thing from Boston to San Diego.

AH: What attracted you so much to the Sonja character?

THORNE: I suppose she uncorked some sort of repressed sexual fantasy inside me. It's one of those ineffable things. The concept captivated me. I had several of the

Howard pieces, and I'd been watching the Marvel *Conan* stuff. After the meeting I devoured Howard's "Shadow of the the Vulture." Sonja's role in that was just a divine snippet. I swallowed it whole.

Sonja became an obsession. In my mind she was real. I drew her crudely at first, and sometimes when I was rushed she'd be cross-eyed and bowlegged, but she always seemed to leap off the page. I was so excited I guess the drawing showed it and the fans picked up. There are other factors involved in it. *Wonder Woman* was on TV, and perhaps the Marvel fans were rooting for one of their own—Sonja. The fabulous redhead was made into a line of paperback books and a major motion picture, so her fans were rewarded.

AH: It's odd that fans have never seemed to, pardon the expression, embrace a heroine before.

THORNE: [Laughs] I'm told that *The Cat* went four issues and *Shanna the She-Devil* five pre *Sonja*. But the redhead's sales continued to be robust. Actually, the sales on the early issues of *Red Sonja* were stronger than *Conan* was in the early days. The *Conan* book was officially cancelled because of poor sales at the beginning.

AH: I think it was cancelled for about a week, but no one really knew until several years later when Roy revealed the fact.

THORNE: Sonja's sales were healthy even toward the end of my involvement, which was 18 issues later. I gather they then leveled off or declined.

AH: I remember a time when the series and the character itself were accused of being a sexist fantasy.

THORNE: We heard that a lot, and it's partly true. But I didn't then, and I refuse now to apologize for my manhood, even as it fades. If history has forgotten *Sonja*, it's also forgotten my libido. I received one or two nasty letters, eclipsed by boxes of wonderful mail. We had, during her heyday, an entire room in the house devoted to *Sonja* stuff the fans had sent. Dolls, drawings, buttons, fan magazines, and photos of the *Sonja* models. There were about eight or nine girls and one guy that used to dress as Red Sonja.

AH: Hmmm. I never heard that one before.

THORNE: Yep, he was from the coast...

AH: Which coast?

THORNE: Your coast. California.

AH: Our coast. Why did I have to ask?



Red Sonja: sexist fantasy or finally a heroine who could stand on her own?

"Actually, there were about eight or nine girls and one guy who used to dress as Red Sonja."

THORNE: [Laughs] His name was Fred something, and Angelique always used to call him "Fred Sonja" [laughs]. He actually made a rather good looking Sonja. Some of the fans joked that several of the Red Sonjas looked like fellas. Well, this was a fella that looked like Red Sonja. Actually, we seldom hear from any of the girls these days, except for Linda Behrle who I've worked with for years. She's Sargasso in the *Ribit!* series playing opposite me as Boomer Fen, the renegade alchemist [laughs]. Linda is the beautiful Sargasso, reservoir of all knowledge. **AH:** [mishearing] Of oral knowledge?

THORNE: No [laughs raucously]! That's all knowledge. Anyway, when I started *Ghita of Alizarr* I used Linda as the model for the covers and poster and the TV stuff. Wendy

Pini, of course, had gone on to fame with *Elfquest*, and justly so because she really is terrifically gifted. But Richard deserves equal credit. He can do most anything, and he's extremely bright. The greatest times with Sonja were in connection with Wendy and Richard. We ended up in glory at the San Diego Con in '78. The best show we ever did. We packed 'em in. Fabulous. But it all ended on a curious note. The next day Wendy and I, in costume, were taping a PBS piece on top of the El Cortez hotel. The wind was blowing in the late afternoon sun. Her wig was askew, and she began to wilt out of character. She whispered to me that it was all unreal. At the end of the Con we said our goodbyes, tearfully. Sonja was behind us. They moved on to *Elfquest* and I to *Ghita of Alizarr*. We've talked on the phone, and visited a few times, but that was it. Long live Sonja!

AH: At that time your work on the comic itself was sort of winding down, wasn't it?

THORNE: True. I did the last issue in April '78. I guess *Ghita* was within me, almost like the chest buster scene in *Alien*. In a way *Ghita* burst out like the Alien.

AH: Of course, when you think of



By Gary Washington and Brian Thomas

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all the sexual undertones to *Alien* the analogy makes a lot of sense.

THORNE: Exactly. Heaven knows it didn't look like I was repressing much when I was doing *Sonja*, but *Ghita* proved that there was a lot held back. While drawing *Sonja* I felt there were a lot of were a lot of unexplored possibilities. I fancied that she should have a creature as a sidekick, etc. But Roy had an iron hand on the script. If I were to change a line or a word, he would become petulant.

AH: I guess you're one of the few artists who had the option of doing that because you did the art and all the lettering yourself.

THORNE: That's right. But he would always catch me at it [laughs]. And he would call me up and dress me down. But that's okay: Roy and I got along all right. The stories toward the end were getting a bit too fantastical. It bothered my orderly mind. I have an orderly mind—rotten, but orderly [laughs]. Which brings me back to Linda. See what I mean? [laughs] As *Ghita* Linda used the name Laina Morrow. We had such fun picking that name. After a couple of glasses of chablis Linda gets outrageously silly. That night in the studio we were kicking around the nuttiest bunch of names in the universe. Actually Linda picked Laina, and I tagged her Morrow after Gray Morrow, one of the best craftsmen in the field. But, now that I've gone straight [laughs] with *Ribbit!* back in the mainstream, Linda is using her own honest-to-goodness name. Besides being gorgeous and possessing one of the most fabulous frames in the galaxy, Linda is abundantly gifted. She's a fine actress, singer, and comedienne. We did *Ghita* and *Moonshine McJugs* live on the Playboy channel, and later video demos of *Ghita* for our trip to the film festival in Europe. She's amazing. She can do makeup, costumes, everything. Linda's the only *Sonja* still by my side, although my costume has changed and so has *Sonja's* [laughs].

AH: That's true.

THORNE: In order to keep *Ghita* out of the hands of the usual comic book audience I went to a literary agent. Al Zuckerman at Writers House in Manhattan repped me for several years. Al did the negotiating with Jim Warren for *Ghita's* run in 1984/1994. Bill DuBay was the editor at that time. Another sweetheart.

Anyway, Al thought that Jim was a bit flaky, which sounded okay to me because I'm flaky too. In fact,



Frank Thorne's *Ghita*: a chance to do what he couldn't do with *Sonja*.

Jim and I got along *marvelously*. We're the same age and both of us played trumpet, he around Philly, and me in Jersey. We traded tales about Betty Page and Irving Klaw, who ran a shop that peddled bondage photos in Greenwich Village. I didn't know it at the time, but it must have been Jim standing next to me at the counter breathing heavily as we thumbed through the albums of photos of Betty and Maria Stinger. Jim and me—two of a kind. So a literary agent made the contracts, which is rare in comics. Al was interested in *Ghita*, and later on, with the collapse of the Warren empire, I found those agreements to be vital in holding onto my rights when Harris took over the Warren titles. I've since moved *Ghita* to Josep Toutain in Spain because comics is his specialty. I was an oddity at Writers House, but we were invited to some very interesting parties and met some fine writers and authors. I don't pretend to be either one.

AH: Like who?

THORNE: Oh, let's see, there was Ken Follett. We got along pretty well. After three or four fingers of Al's classy redeye *anybody* gets along pretty good. Yep, the Writers

House Christmas parties were great, but not as good as the Playboy parties [laughs]. Kim, you gotta be in your forties or fifties to know the original aura of Hefner and the whole *Playboy* thing. It has dimmed somewhat, unfortunately. For a fifties guy like me to get close to the Playboy experience was a wonderful passage. I'll add right away that the *Sonja* celebration was great, but what happened after it was even more marvelous. The redhead never got us to Europe or into a movie option. I was drawn into the *Red Sonja* movie deal briefly early on. Ralph Bakshi was a big *Sonja* fan and he wanted to direct the film. It was to be his first live-action movie. Arthur Lieberman, one of the producers, called me and I trucked my stuff in to talk about the whether I would be interested in doing the storyboarding. At that time Loretta Ybarra was being considered for the role on *Sonja*. She has a tattoo, Kim! But I won't tell you where it is... [laughs]. That was '83. Arthur handles all the merchandising for the Howard characters. You know that strange tale of how the Howard material passed on through the family doctor to his children. God



Multi-talented Linda Berhle (as Ghita) who was also a Sonja and, of course, Frank Thorne (as the wise wizard).

knows who has them now. Whoever it is, Arthur represents him or her. So we meet at Arthur's office in Manhattan. Well, Loretta impressed me as being a skinny lady, and later I told Arthur my impression. To me, Linda was the ideal buxom warrior woman. Anyway, Arthur looks over the *Ghita* material, she had done very well at Warren and was starting in Europe. Arthur advised me to forget the storyboarding and press for a *Ghita* movie. He offered to act as negotiator. As it turned out Richard Fleischer directed the *Sonja* movie and Brigitte Nielsen was cast as the redhead. It wasn't a bad movie. Did you see it?

AH: No, I never did.

THORNE: I guess it wasn't a good movie, but it did have some very good things going for it. Of course we saw it opening night at the Cranford Theater. Friends and relatives filled a couple of rows. I think we were the only ones in the theater, and it was a Friday night! [laughs].

Somewhere along the line, *Danger Rangerette*, another one of the spawn of Red Sonja, came out. She had a run in the *National Lampoon* and then we moved her over to *High*

Times. And of course, through *Danger Rangerette*, Sonja also begat *Moonshine McJugs*.

AH: Back to Playboy.

THORNE: Right. That was in '79. Things were happening very fast at that time. *Danger Rangerette* had

"See, you gotta be in your fifties to know the original aura of Hefner and the whole *Playboy* thing."

become a burden and was conveniently put aside by *High Times* after someone blew away half the administration through some sort of tong war. Anyway, it seems that *Playboy* had seen *Ranger* and Michelle Urry, the cartoon editor, invited me to submit a strip idea. The *Playboy* people are wonderful. It's actually very sedate, even genteel, and highly civilized around the offices. Well, I went in with *Moonshine McJugs*

and the rest you know. They bought 30 of the strips, I received the award in '81, and they put Linda and me on the TV show in '85.

AH: This went on until it died with the rest of the *Playboy* Funnies section?

THORNE: They dropped the funnies section a couple of years ago. *Playboy* only ran 17 *Moonshines*. There are 13 that are relegated to limbo unless Josep can sell some of them in Europe. We're not talking about a lot of money to Josep or me, but it would be nice to see them published, even if it is in another language or two.

Incidentally, although there is a glamour to the *Playboy* parties—and the setting, Hefner's penthouse, is impressive—all that ever showed up were cartoonists, most of whom got promptly smashed. I never even saw a Bunny! [laughs]

AH: Hefner was a cartoonist.

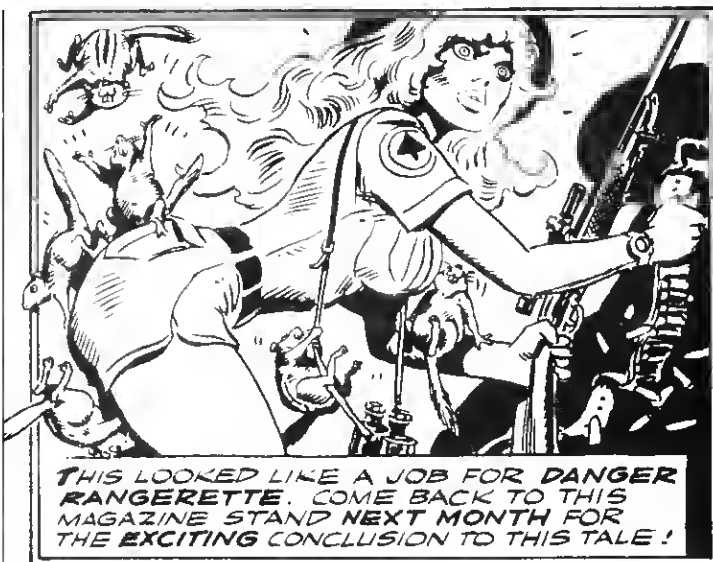
THORNE: Right. He recalls being a cartoonist for a military newspaper. He said he was a better editor than a cartoonist. He has one cartoonist's trait: his handwriting is impossible to read. His memos need expert deciphering.

With the demise of Warren I visited Julie Simmons-Lynch at *Heavy Metal*. I had done about 200 pages of *Ghita* and was thinking of a new approach. Long live *Ghita* as well! [laughs] She still produces royalties. My blonde performed well for Pacific/Blue Dolphin. They did a beautiful book. I think the Italian *Ghita*, in gravure, is the nicest, but the Schanes boys had their heart in it. When they went chapter II owing me money I didn't hassle them. They were doing some nice things. I moved *Ghita* to Catalan Communications, and she's been there ever since.

Now for a news item. I was talking to Bernd Metz, Catalan's publisher in Manhattan. He said that they did very well at the ABA book convention. There is a good chance that we'll be seeing the Catalan books in the big book chains. Bernd is a splendid fellow. He, Marilyn, and I ate live eels and rabbit heads together in La Forista outside of Barcelona. When you eat baby live eels with somebody there's a bond there [laughs]. *Ghita* is very popular in Spain.

Meanwhile, back at the *Heavy Metal* office, Julie asked me to do something from the magazine other than *Ghita* of *Alizarr*. I was busy, but the idea of doing something for *Metal* intrigued me. Early on I'd thought *Ghita* might have been better placed at *Metal*, but the Warren deal was better as far as Zuckerman was concerned. There's a slight tale of woe to come, eclipsed by meeting the Workman brothers, who were in their last days on the *Metal* staff. John was art director, and Bill assisted him. They are the most unassuming, flat out friendly pair in the industry. I met them on my only visit to the magazine. Later, when I heard they were out at *Metal*, I called John, who lives in nearby Hazlet, and invited him, Bill, and Cathy, John's wife, to a backyard thing. We had a bunch of the guys over to welcome them to the wonderful world of freelancing. We've been friends of the Workmans' ever since. A splendid spin-off from *Metal*. It's sad to see the mag reduced to being a quarterly. *Lann*, future fantasy's most sultry space adventuress, was what I devised for *Metal*. Julie liked the idea. Josep would start in his *Zona '84* in Spain. Separations to be done in Spain—everything was in place.

Funny thing about these personal creations. Truly personal, because I've been drawing myself into most of the post-*Sonja* material. *Lann* did



From *National Lampoon* to *High Times* the natural Danger Rangerette.

not flow out of me like the blondes. She fought me from day one. *Ghita* was a covert operation; maybe *Lann* was too overt. Too simple. Actually, I was musing on doing it pantomime. Could be that *Ghita* was jealous, and concocted a case of mental molasses around *Lann*. Practically, it was the first time I had written a strip in uniform eight-page chapters. *Ghita*'s chapters varied in length, and that was easier. Very important: For maximum distribution in Europe, do the stories in eight-page chapters. Each story should wind up at 48 pages to allow for

publication in album form. I was sweating *Lann* out. Not feeling right about it. I had to rush some of it because of schedule problems... I decided after 48 pages that would be it for the brunette. Maybe I should stick to blondes—or green-haired female beasts.

Next is coming the *Ghita* movie option. There had been several meetings and conversations with film people, but this was a legal document with Flaxman/Hyde Productions. Arthur Lieberman helped me with the agreement. I hasten to add that I could never afford Arthur, but, here we go again, we get along well. He sees the potential for a *Ghita* film, and will receive his percentage if the film deal is made. Flaxman had seen Linda and me doing the live action sequence of *Ghita* on the Playboy Channel. Have you seen that, by any chance?

AH: No. I haven't.

THORNE: It was super. We took over the MacDougal Street Theater in the Village in Manhattan for a day to rehearse. It was taped the next day in Bill Wagner's huge photo arena that's part of his studio complex in Cranford. The action played beautifully on an all-white background. We had blood-bespattered bodies... the works. The *Moonshine-Uncle Zii* piece was a natural for the white background. Next I invited F/H out to the studio to see the *Ghita* demo tapes that we'd made at the Center for Media Arts in New York City. We were getting ready to take the tapes to the Lucca comics festival.

A footnote to that: We went from Lucca to Rome for a week's stay and

A Thorne Playboy centerfold?



they were shooting interior shots for the *Red Sonja* film as we arrived. I tried, but by gum, I couldn't even get on the set. Cartoonists have no clout [laughs].

AH: Well, it might just be writers in general. They're not the most respected people in the screen community.

THORNE: They said that Brigitte Nielsen is very nervous and she was afraid she'd blow her lines if there were strangers on the set.

Meanwhile, back in the studio with Harvey Flaxman and Jay Hyde... they had produced *Grizzly* and were winding up *Hunting Season*. *Ghita* was to be their next project. Hyde could have been an actor. He was handsome, but not too tall. His father wasn't tall either. Jay's dad was Johnny Hyde, the agent who

"When you eat baby live eels with someone there's a bond there."

discovered Marilyn Monroe. Through that afternoon Jay would tell wonderful stories about Marilyn and Johnny. It was clear that somehow Jay saw a parallel in the relationships between the Wizard and Ghita and Johnny and Marilyn. He'd read both *Ghita* books and knew every line. Maybe Jay understood *Ghita* better than I did. If I had any suspicions about Jay's yarns, they were dispelled at our next meeting at Jay's sumptuous apart-

ment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The place was filled with photos and memorabilia. Also, somewhere in the complex lived Polly Hyde, Johnny's wife. She was bed-ridden. At the beginning of Marilyn's rise to stardom, Johnny left Polly and he and Marilyn moved into a mansion that sported a custom built nightclub for Marilyn to perform in. Johnny's move split the family in two. Eventually Polly joined Jay in the 83rd Street apartment.

By now we were working full tilt on the screen treatment, which is an adaptation of the first *Ghita* book to a film concept. There's a big difference between the book and the film concept. Comics look cinematic, but they are a zillion miles from real movie action. At the same time that I was doing the treatment, I was developing set and costume designs. By far the most exciting period of the *Ghita* thing.

The story meetings at Jay's would be garnished with buxom blondes: I never saw so many beautiful and talented dames with credits that filled a page—all apparently looking for work! One scrumptious girl, Cindy, floated in during a session. She sat on a long couch within my view, just over Harvey's shoulder. It was like a *Benny Hill* skit. I started to get distracted as she crossed her legs. Then cross-eyed, then wall-eyed. Finally pop-eyed. At the break Jay introduces Cindy. She gets up—slow and smoothly. The dame is a six-footer. Long blonde hair, full-breasted. It was *Ghita*. I'm in a swoon. Then Cindy speaks. She sounded just like Betty Boop [laughs]! Disaster. But not to Jay. He stands next to her, taps her on the tush, and has her rotate before us as he describes her breathtaking attributes. He was like a butcher in a meat factory turning a slab of beef on a hook. We all agreed that her voice wasn't right, but perhaps we could write her into the harem scene.

Soon the producers had birthed the idea of a search to find the girl that would star as *Ghita*. There would be a tie-in with *Playboy*. If they could place the search with *Playboy* there would be no problem raising the money for the film. *Playboy* was interested, but they could not give them more than four or five pages, not near enough to have the search concept work. We wanted at least two pages in eight consecutive issues. *Playboy* backed off. Now is coming *Gotterdammerung*. The guys announce that they will go over

Flailing demon entrails from *Ghita* of Alizarr with Theneff the Wizard.



to Guccione at *Penthouse*. A shoo-in. He'll pounce. They have an inside track. He'll love *Ghita* and the search idea. ... I said no. As I owned the property, I could and would prevail. *Playboy* had been so good to me, the thought of going to the competition was out of the question. End of movie thing, this time around. A month later Polly died. The month after that Harvey calls to tell me that Jay had died. Gone was another part of the Monroe legend. Also gone was *Ghita's* biggest fan, other than me.

A lot of movie material was developed, and I have it all, including the treatment. Toutain is publishing some of the visuals in Europe as eight-page features, so that may create some interest abroad. So you pick up the pieces and move on. Remember the chest-buster scene? Now is coming the spawn of the sorceress, a familiar that becomes a mortal.

AH: So, the movie explains the long break between Lann and Ribit!

THORNE: The film experience consumed a lot of time. It takes a while to shift gears. Kim, I guess you know about that. You got to let the well fill up again. So through the summer of '86 I began to kick around some ideas. Working with Harvey on the treatment was inspiring. So I reviewed some of the elements and pacing in the treatment and started forming the new series, as yet unnamed. At a lawn party at John Workman's I ran the idea past



Lann from *Heavy Metal*

Archie Goodwin—yep, yet another sweet and honest guy—at Marvel's Epic line. My problem with Marvel is that they must have 50% of foreign sales. I have a commitment with Toutain, plus I may need Europe if the new thing bombs. Archie suggested Comico. I call Diana Schutz and we set up a meeting in Norristown, Pennsylvania, just outside of Philly. We met in November, and... they're all so young, Kim!

AH: And I bet they're all nice people, too.

THORNE: Yeah. I'm afraid this is going to be non-controversial

[laughs]. Anyway, Phil LaSorda was there with Diana and Bob Schreck, who used to hang around with the Creation Con guys when we were doing the *Wiz and Sonja* show at the Statler Hilton in Manhattan. We did it on the same stage that Glen Miller band broadcasts originated. Fabulous. I was misty-eyed, being and old trumpet player. It was a big hall, and we filled it. Wendy was great as Sonja. Did you ever see her in the role?

AH: Yeah, once.

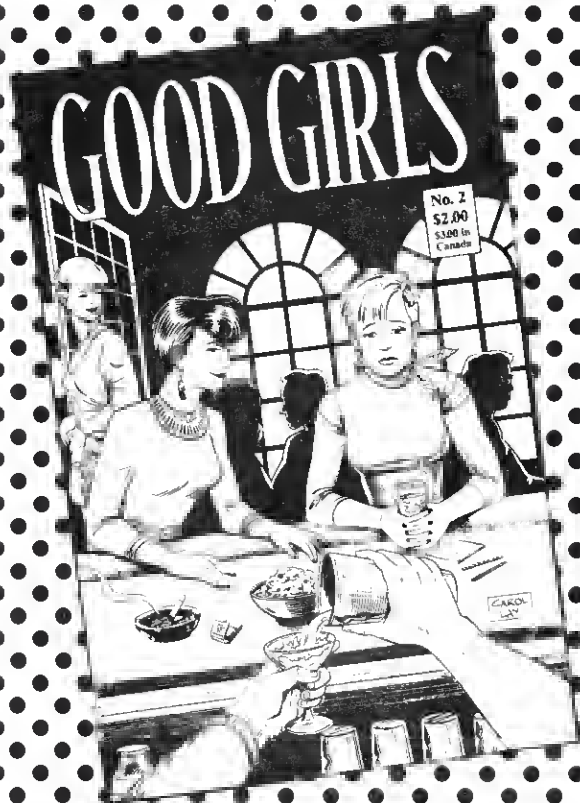
THORNE: Ohhhh... She was Red Sonja. Anyway, the chemistry was right at the Comico meeting and, for the record, if the new series is successful we'll have to credit Diana for tagging it, because I was thinking of calling it *Dread Spawn* or *Green Spawn*, or maybe just *Spawn*. Diana said we gotta call it *Ribit!*, with the exclamation point. I'm sure it's a good choice, because Comico has been doing very well. *Ribit!* is a four-issue, full-color mini-series. Twenty-six pages each. It will be released in the spring of '88. It's mainstream. Actually, *Ribit!* is flat chested, green, and thirty inches tall.

AH: That must be quite a change for you.

THORNE: [Laughs] Yes, but the sorceress Sahtee is amply proportioned. She's named for the composer Eric Satie, who's one of my favorites. Anyway, the first two books feature the origin of Rib and her battle with the chrome clad

Lann (actress Linda Beveridge) has Shard (Frank) at a thoughtful disadvantage, playing with TV-part chessmen.



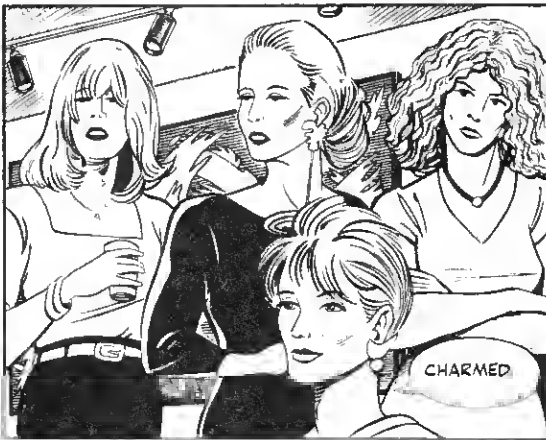


WHY IS THIS GOOD GIRL ON A BENDER

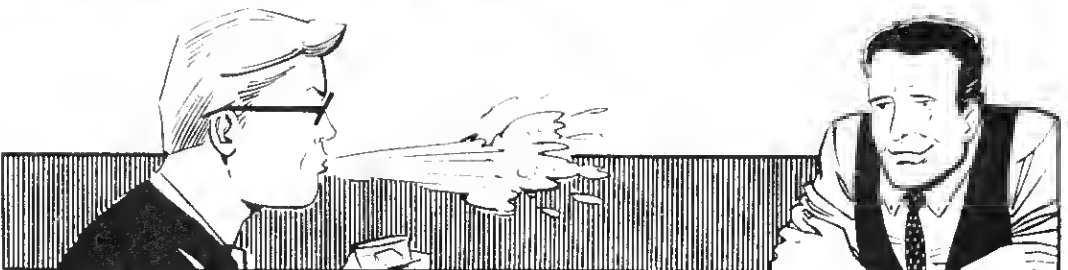
*SHE'S GOT A GREAT
WARDROBE...*



*SHE KNOWS A LOT OF
FABULOUS BABES...*



*...AND SHE DOESN'T
LOOK LIKE THIS.*



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"I think passion does not necessarily have to be libidinous ... I'm enjoying this as much as I've enjoyed anything."

warlord. The second two books will be a story called *The Isle of the Sea God*, which was an idea I had for the third *Ghita* book.

AH: *Have you found it difficult adapting to the idea of doing something that's less adult oriented?*

THORNE: I think passion does not necessarily have to be libidinous passion. Rib's un-libidinous passion, and I'm enjoying this as much as I've enjoyed anything. It's all part of a whole. Still, if *Ghita* and the rest hadn't done so well, I might be back drawing *Korak*. I might have to take another look at the passion meter.

AH: *Do you want to talk about the concepts and characters in Ribit!, since that seems to be your current flame, as it were?*

THORNE: The back cover blurb on this one reads: "Medieval sorcery confronts the deadly weapons of modern science when the chrome clad warlord commands his demon hordes to exterminate the practitioners of obsolete magic and destroy the Orb of Green Crystal." That sets the tone of it. Central to the story is Thogroanus, the sorceress' apprentice. Thog is a punked-out hulk with a half-closed eye and a wayward nose. The sorceress is surrounded with a swarm of small creatures that aid her with her spells. Thog has a special relationship with one of the lizard-like beasts. He brings her sweet coated mealworms and tells her tales of the far place. Only Thog can understand her speech. She utters a frog-like sound; thus, Thog calls her Ribit.

Thogroanus has another love, the image of Blonde Fire on his favorite video. Blonde Fire is a statuesque golden-haired bombshell. Saatee plots the downfall of the warlord, and begins to brew up a mighty warrior woman to do her bidding. She allows Thog, her faithful minion, to pick the form, and he chooses Blonde Fire, but something happens to the mix.

AH: *Doesn't it always?*

THORNE: [laughs] To find out what happens in the mix you'll have to wait to read the first book. Anyway, out of the cauldron is com-

ing, instead of a majestic warrior woman, a three foot tall green lady that sounds like a frog and eats yellow meal worm beetles. It's a running gag that I'm using in the second book where Rib encounters the elves. I used to tell Wendy that wizards have a natural dislike for elves. Now I'm drawing them [laughs].

AH: *Now, why don't you like elves?*

THORNE: I teased her a lot when she was starting *Elfquest*. But mine are not serious elves. One looks like Clark Gable. It's perfect because of the ears. I can't wait until you see Queen Hermione.

So we have Thog, his little green lady, and Saatee, who has been transformed into the shape of one of her beastie bunch. The sorceress now looks like a little hairy mollusk with arms and legs. These are the stars of the show.

A footnote on Rib's hair. It looks serpentine, like a riot of leeches. It fits, 'cause she was a lizard. Actually it came to me while staring at the statue of David in Florence. I was fascinated by his hair, and planned to use that configuration on my next heroine.

AH: *So it was borrowed from a classical source.*

THORNE: Forgive me I'm getting a little high-toned here, with Eric Satie and Michelangelo. But you draw from everything—*Moonshine McJugs* from Al Capp and Rib's hair from Michelangelo [laughs]. It's all of a piece.

AH: *It's a continuum, high to low.*

THORNE: I'm definitely in the low range and love it down here. Let's hope that Ribit! lives up to the expectations of Comico.

AH: *Comico has had a really excellent track record so far. You never wrote anything before Ghita, did you?*

THORNE: Very little, although I've always been a reader. One of the advantages of writing your own stuff is the writers say, "God, he's a terrible writer, but his drawings aren't bad." And the cartoonists say, "His drawings are lousy, but he writes okay." So you come out about even [laughs]. I would never pretend to be a writer; I do the words only to abet the drawings.

AH: *You seem very sensitive to the integration of the copy into the drawings. I notice you seem to go out of your way to fill up a caption all the way through and to just mold it so it's part of the graphic design.*

THORNE: That's because I'm

Cover for *Ribit!* by Frank: sorcery, science, and serpentine hair.





Thogroanus's little friend is soon to be the surprisingly flat-chested. . .

looking at it as a designer. Having total control of my output, I can stretch or reduce text to suit the design. I plan very carefully. The *Ghita* stuff, which is probably my most elaborate enterprise, was premeditated right down to the double outline around the balloons—done freehand, I might add.

AH: Did you double the lines because you were working in black-and-white and it was therefore harder to tell where the balloons began and the art ended?

THORNE: I don't know. This is just another will-o'-the-wisp, Kim. It just drifts in and you grab hold and drift out after it.

AH: Do it 'cause it looks right.

THORNE: Correct. When you know it looks right, you go with it. That's one of the advantages, part of the ecstasy of having total control.

You can design the logos, pick the letter form, and if bombs you're totally responsible. But if it plays it's Beethoven's Ninth.

AH: I guess you're very appreciative that in the last ten years the creator's position in comics has gotten a lot better.

THORNE: Absolutely. The copyright decision was wonderful. That was one of the reasons—that and Richard Corben. Seeing the early Corben stuff was a revelation. I never got over seeing Alex Raymond's drawings when I was a kid, same as when I saw the first Corbens. Those underground guys really spun me around.

AH: In many ways the new alternative comics are spawned by the undergrounds, sometimes in very subtle ways.

THORNE: And some in not to

. . . Ribit—due out in her own title from Comico in Spring of '88.



subtle ways. The sexual content draws you into Corben's art, but once caught the stuff is bewitching. It's from another place. The women, so outrageously buxom, so cockeyed wonderful, so grotesque, so beautiful. Looking at drawing like that had me shouting. "This is what comics can be!" The door was flung open by *Sonja Ghita* and I went through it together.

AH: I assume you'd never go back to being a gun-for-hire.

THORNE: I wouldn't speculate on tomorrow morning, or late tonight for that matter.

AH: How do you compare working in black-and-white and working in color?

THORNE: Well, I'm doing *Ribit!* in just about the same way I did *Moonshine McJugs*. Using that watercolor technique I mentioned. I love to do the color stuff. The *Ribit!* pages are done in black-and-white. I have them shot down to 9 by 13 so they'll fit on a very good plain paper copier. I mount the copy and color that. The pages are reduced again to the printed size, which softens the modeling.

AH: Watercolor doesn't tend to overwhelm the line drawing, where something like strong markers can battle it.

THORNE: Yeah. I like the freshness of watercolor. It's sudden death. If it isn't right at first it loses its brilliance, but that's part of the challenge of it. I've tried oils but was never very good at it. I stand in awe of Boris. The stuff he does is so fresh. Maybe I'm too impatient. I have a thing when I see a Boris or a Frazetta. I wonder what one of those ladies would say? What would the Deathstalker say? Does he talk nonsense? I'm nowhere near those super talents, but at least I have a little theater where my characters just don't stand there. They say things. Funny things. Silly things. You get an idea of what they are saying. I've carried it to the extent where I go into a museum and look at a Reubens or a Velasquez and murmur. "I wonder they are saying? What is that kid saying? Is he unhappy?" I keep writing captions over huge paintings in the Met [laughs]. I really feel that what I'm doing is theater more than anything else.

AH: I guess you're an inveterate storyteller.

THORNE: Theatrics. For instance, a lot of the inspiration for *Ghita* was drawn from the Wizard shows. *Moonshine McJugs'* first material comes out of the stuff I had written for a piece Linda and I did called

Barf Beltless and Danger Rangerette. It was a performance piece. Barf Beltless became Barf McBuns, etc.

AH: I don't know if you've been following the recent worry about sex and censorship and ratings in comics. As someone who's had a history of fairly ribald things, how do you feel about this whole brouhaha?

THORNE: Who's brewing the haha? [laughs] Who is saying this yet again? With a porn department in every video rental store on every corner. With Seka and Marilyn Chambers common household names? It must be Tipper Gore [laughs].

AH: Several comics distributors are getting a little worried about it.

THORNE: True, Bernd said several of the distributors simply refuse to handle the Catalan books. Some of them are gorgeous.

AH: I think that's changed since then, though.

THORNE: I readily confess that I am far from the maddening crowd. Time is so precious it seems harder and harder to capture those hours where you can actually produce the stuff. I get drawn into world affairs like Ollie and the Bork brouhaha and I get all brouhaha'd out. Sometimes I neglect my own craft, but I do keep up with *AH*, *GBG*, and *CJ*.

If anybody's to blame for the sexual stuff, I'll be there in the lineup. But I'm not apologizing for it. Blame my succubus [laughs].

AH: The major argument is whether or not publishers should put warning labels on the material.

THORNE: I think the publishers should. Actually, when Catalan took over *Ghita* they just ran the logo on the cover. But it is a twelve dollar

"Out comes this three and a half foot high lady that sounds like a frog and eats yellow meal worm beetles."

book in a tight plastic wrapper.

AH: Yeah, that's a hint right there.

THORNE: What kid is going to put out twelve bucks?

AH: Say if you were publishing it in a \$1.50 color comic, though...

THORNE: I think *Ghita* is separate from it—not implying that it's better, just that it's different.

AH: Would you say that you're doing right what you want to do at this point in your life?

THORNE: Exactly. Again, thanks to *Sonja*. Rib will probably be dubbed "Little Green Sonja." Every time I come up with something new I hear "it looks just like Red Sonja," or "this looks just like Ranger." Well, folks, that's the way Frankie-boy draws the ladies [laughs]. This time the heroine is different, in measurement and in size.

AH: Even Richard Corben draws small chested women once in awhile.

THORNE: I understand that he's been censoring his own stuff now. I wonder whether it has to do with his daughter being 12 years old.

Kim, I must mention that while I'm cooking the burgers on the grill I hear the names of my creation wafting from the next yard. Our neighbours have named their very beautiful Chesapeake Bay retriever

after my golden goddess of Alizarr. Then, too, while pulling up the driveway to the Toutains' villa, down from the house is coming a pair of very fancy Pyrenees mastiffs. One brown, one gold. One Rowlf, one *Ghita*. I can't hear Josep when he calls his mastiffs, but I can hear David Zuchero next door calling out *Ghita's* name.

AH: I see you cite as your major influences Alex Raymond and Hal Foster.

THORNE: Those were the very early years.

AH: Who else would you put into your melting pot?

THORNE: I always loved Frank Robbins's stuff, but I never could copy it. Somehow I missed Caniff's influence. The craftsmen bred in that era were either Caniff clones or Raymond clones. I was in the Raymond camp. I think perhaps Caniff has influenced more because it seemed easier to copy his stuff. Of course Al Williamson, who is so great, kind of continues Raymond's style, even today. He was definitely a Raymond guy, as I was.

But after that I fell under the influence of Neal O'Keefe, who did a full-sized Sunday page called *Dick's Adventures in Dreamland*. Then there was Toth, of course. In his 20s he was doing the most fabulous stuff. I dared not copy Alex or I'd get a 15-page letter. Alex criticized my stuff brilliantly, but brutally. It helped. But the man I owe the most to is Harry Devlin. I know it was Harry that melded the whole thing and urged me to get away from Raymond. He was telling a 20-year-old kid to have his own style [laughs]! Looking back on it I now know it was good advice. Harry kept

Worms: new yuppie trend—after sushi—which Frank promises will be a continuing delicacy in *Ribit!*





The sorceress Shatee, searching for the Orb of the Green Crystal, in two of her manifestations—beauty and the beast: the latter about to attack Ribit!

guiding me. He was very professional. He'd tell me practical things like "You're drawing your ears too big!" or "This is dreadful... it's too predictable... it's too cute, I hate cute things!" He was one of the finest, most original cartoonists this land has ever produced. He chose

to leave it behind and turn to doing oils of stately and unique old houses. He and his wife Wende have done a lot of popular children's books. Harry introduced me to the drawings of Sullivant, for an instance. He was like Virgil. I live in fear that a copy of *Ghita* will fall within his

grasp. Doing a lot of straight illustration helped me to find myself. I'm still looking, by the way [laughs]. When I needed some real bucks to raise the family, I'd turn to illustration. Bucks. Fred and Hy were talking about how in the '50s we were paid 30 bucks a page for pencilling and inking. But on it goes. Young Dwayne Ferguson lives nearby. His *Hamster Vice* is very hot. Dwayne tells me he got 25 bucks a page as against royalties. Some royalties arrived for a couple of issues. Then zip. He went on doing the books for a while—at 25 bucks a page! Period. So, things haven't changed much—in 40 years. They gave us 30 bucks a page, but didn't promise royalties. I guess that's called paying your dues. Kim, have you paid your dues? [laughs]

AH: I think I have. I hope I have, I can't afford too many more.

THORNE: I keep getting bills [laughs]. I keep writing on them, "I've already paid this!"

AH: What's the single piece of advice you'd give a young cartoonist?

THORNE: The single piece of advice? Uh...

AH: Now that you're a dean in the field.

THORNE: A dean? [laughs] Well, if I'm a dean that means that I'm sort of at the top of the faculty?

AH: Yep.

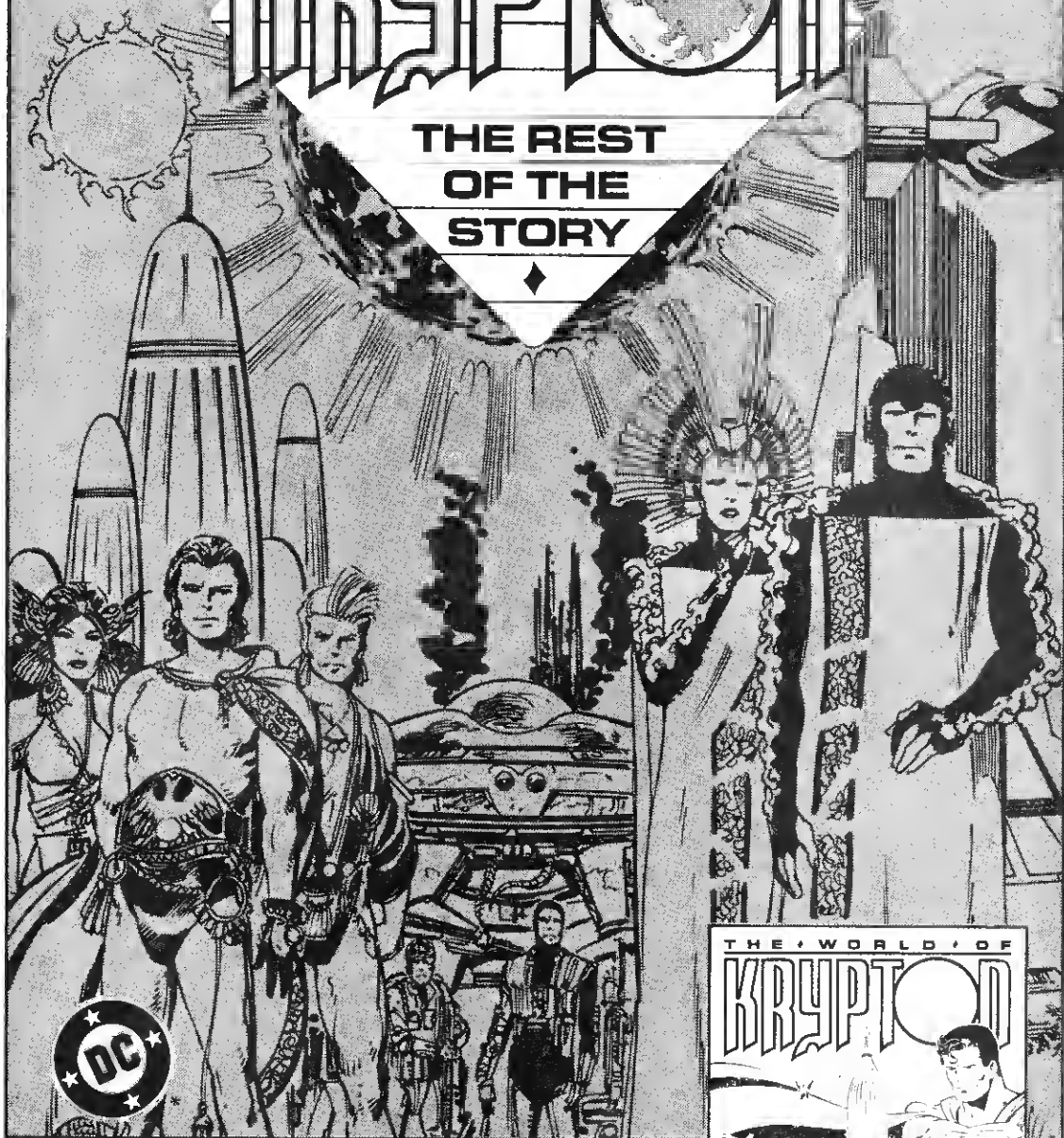
THORNE: Well, it's a very small school, and definitely *not* official. I would say that comics are no big deal, notwithstanding the movie thing and the European travel. But it's a wonderful pursuit. Especially the lifestyle of working at home and being able to orchestrate your fantasies. It's a very small and excellent craft. I would highly recommend it. It's better than a frontal lobotomy [laughs]. It keeps you out of trouble.

I've been very fortunate in having a lot of the younger cartoonists come by occasionally. Brian Buniak lives nearby; he's just finishing the last *Thunderbunny* and he does good stuff. Now he's picking up stuff for *Mad* magazine, and he's on his way. Brian has struggled for years, starving half the time, eating peanut butter the other half. Ask Brian, even years from now. I'm sure he'll tell you comics is no big deal. There is no room for pretentiousness in this craft. If you're going to start parading around saying it's high art or something I think maybe you'd better check the script [laughs]. It's a lot of fun, but high art? I wonder.

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SCRATCH

Scratch began as a college strip with its first "big" appearance in *Cerebus*. The comic, out before the "glut," has a strong following. Creator Charles Treadwell likes stories about major changes, with "a normal guy with some big secret." Each *Scratch* is complete, while exploring how characters live together despite philosophical differences. Treadwell says the key to *Scratch* is not action, but interaction.

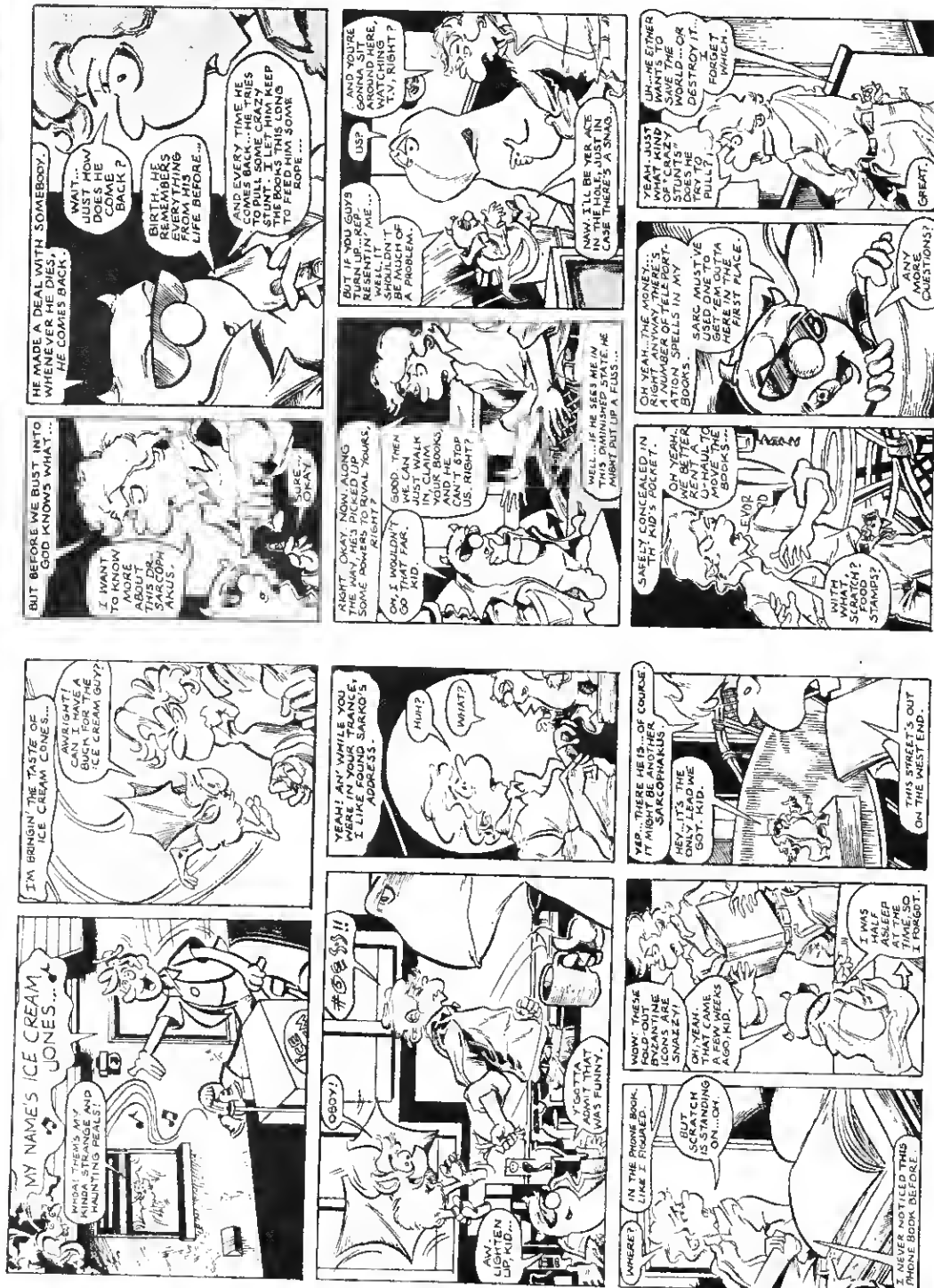
For the future: in trying to get Scratch's books from Dr. Sarcophakus, Treadwell promises, there will be werewolves and lotsa other surprises.



SCRATCH

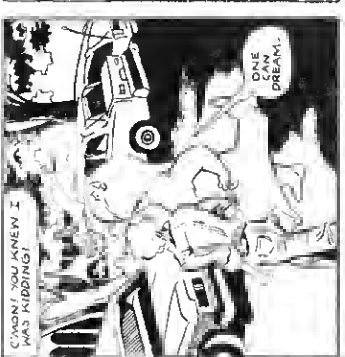
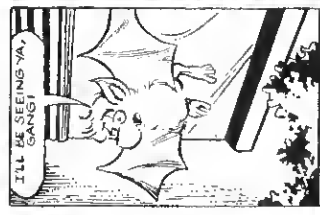
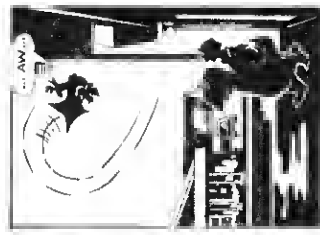
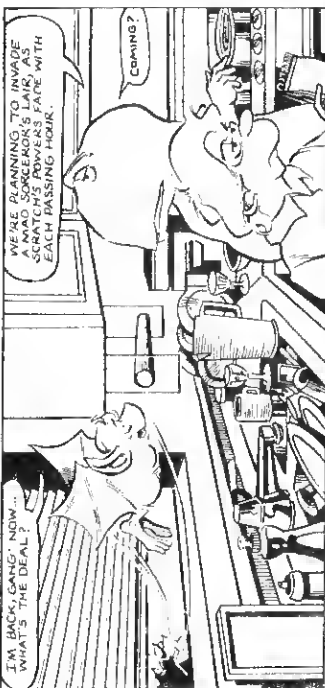


SCRATCH



SCRATCH

Continued in Scratch #6
in mid-August.

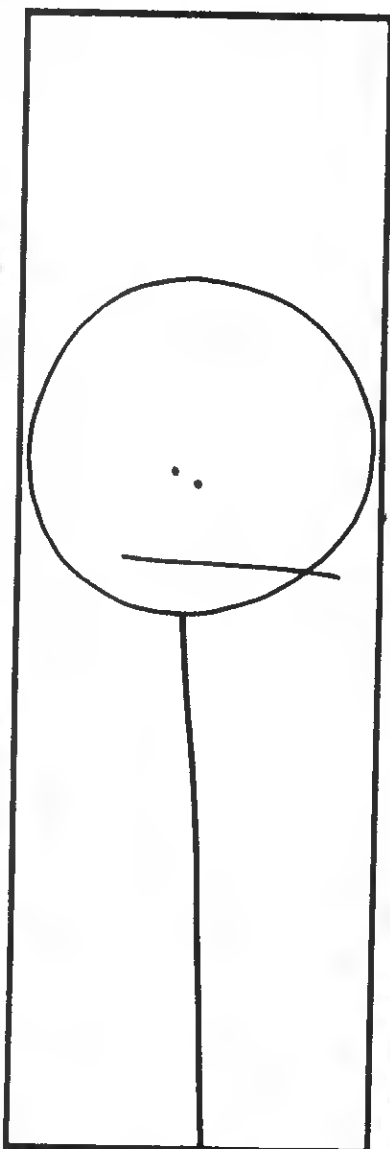




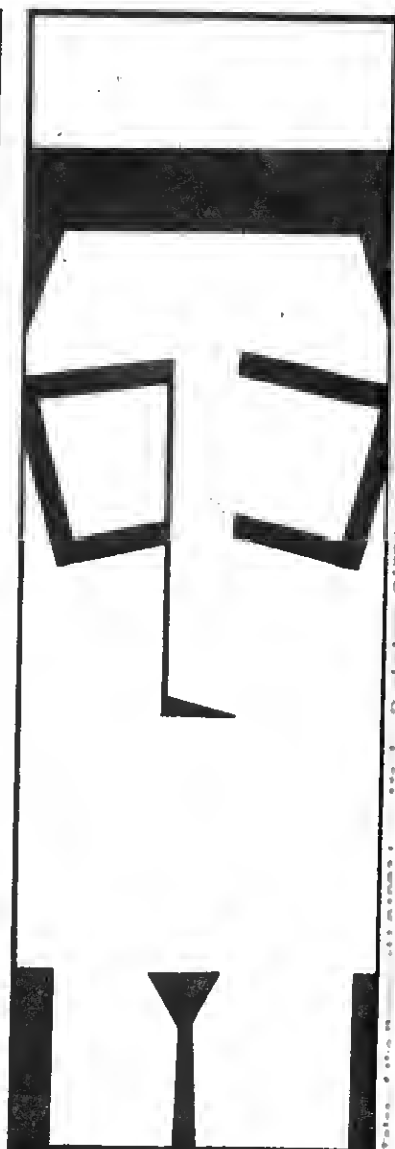
CHANGING THE FACE OF AMERICAN COMICS



TALES OF THE BEANWORLD™
by Larry Marder



CYNICALMAN SPECIAL™
by Matt Feazell



FLOYD FARLAND™
by Chris Ware

The Ace Of Knaves

Dealing With The Joker



by Virginia Williams Pennick

[Others might have done a more detailed book-by-book recapitulation of the Joker's "adventures," but Virginia has gone deeper—into an analysis of the character. I hope you'll find it interesting reading. If not, count the alliterations. —KD]

The Joker. Utter his name and you conjure up emotions ranging from a smile to a shudder.

It's been nearly fifty years since the Batman's most enduring enemy first bowed onto the comic book scene. The Joker has held the position of favorite bat-villain since 1940 and—so far—there has been no serious contenders for his title. Indeed, how could there be? No baddie comes close to matching the exploits of Gotham's greatest ghoul.

Unlike DC characters who've

undergone numerous physical and costume changes over the years, the unflappable Ace of Knaves remains remarkably "stable" in regards to his eerie countenance. That mop of green hair, those blood-red lips and a deathly-pale complexion make this Grinning Gargoyle instantly recognizable to any serious lover of comic book art. As clothes make the man, how appropriately the Joker's garish

wardrobe reflects a mad mentality: purple pants with black stripes, a purple coat with flowing tails, a bright green shirt with an equally striking orange vest (if the colorist was asleep at the wheel, the vest became yellow), and those ever-present gloves. It takes a lot of guts to roam around dressed like that. But while stability in the Joker's physical appearance cannot be disputed, stability in his behavior is quite another matter.

ENTER LAUGHING

The Jeering Jester made his bloody debut in *Batman* #1 (Spring, 1940). He was depicted as being dangerously insane and with scant humor. To be sure, there was nothing funny about a guy who murdered people with such fiendish devices as poison gas, blow darts implanted in telephone receivers, or razor-sharp poker cards soaked in a deadly venom. His "Joker" moniker came from the eccentric habit of leaving a leering playing card at the scene of each crime and *not* from any comical high-jinks.

At first, it seemed as though the Joker's chilling first appearance was going to be his last. The story ends with the Killer Clown accidentally falling upon his own knife during a scuffle with the Batman. The Dark Detective leaves his enemy for dead, but an ashen-faced doctor soon discovers his patient is very much alive. Luckily for connoisseurs of great villains, the Monstrous Mountebank recovers to kill again!

Other guest-spots quickly followed. In *Batman* #8, the Joker deliberately causes a bus filled with convention-hound jewelers to hurtle over a cliff, kills two of his own henchmen with poisoned cigars, and even tries to murder the Batman with a high-powered rifle. Not bad for one issue.

The Joker also seemed to possess a charmed life. In a 1941 story entitled "The Case of the Joker's Crime Circus," the baddie nearly succeeds in throwing Robin through a trap door leading to the sewage water running beneath his current hideout. An enraged Batman intervenes and it is the Joker who tumbles toward certain doom. Remarkably (there was never any explanation as to *how*), the Joker manages to cheat death and soon turns up, whole and hearty, eager to wreak havoc once again.

In a 1942 tale called "The Joker

"MAN SMILES-A SMILE WITH
OUT MIRTH... RATHER A SMILE OF
DEATH! THE AWESOME, GHOSTLY
GRIN OF... THE JOKER!"

"IF THE POLICE EXPECT TO
PLAY AGAINST THE JOKER, THEY
HAD BEST BE PREPARED TO BE
DEALT FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE DECK."



"NEWSPAPERS, RADIOS ALL SCREAM
THE STORY OF THE RUTHLESS, CUNNING
CRIMINAL THE JOKER! AT HOME
BRUCE WAYNE, THE BATMAN, SPEAKS WITH
HIS YOUNG AID DICK GRAYSON, KNOWN AS
ROBIN, THE BOY WONDER!"

BUT BRUCE, WHY DON'T
WE TAKE A SHOT AT
THIS JOKER GUY?



The Joker's bloody debut in *Batman* #1: more insane than humorous.

Walks the Last Mile" (*Detective Comics* #64), the Fiendish Felon is sentenced to death in the electric chair and is promptly executed. (None of your "stay of execution" or "appeals" crap back then, by God!) Immediately after, the Joker's loyal henchmen steal his body from the prison morgue and—through the injection of a serum invented by their late boss—bring the Joker back to life.

This yarn ushered out the "first" Joker, i.e. the killer, and for the next 31 years fans were handed a candy-coated version. Within twelve months the Joker went from a cold-blooded butcher to an almost *pet* baddie, providing comic relief with each appearance.

In *Batman* #16, the Grim Jester is found courageously fighting crime in a small Ozark town. This abrupt change in the Joker's psyche was due to a head injury suffered in a plane crash. A second well-placed bop reverts the heroic clown into his thieving self again.

The remainder of the 1940s saw no major changes in the Joker. All of his crimes were now like comedy skits and anything frightening about the Batman's white-faced foe was only an unpleasant memory. For example, in "Crime in Reverse" (*Detective Comics* #128), the Joker playfully announces the theft of an object before the actual robbery. In *Batman* #53, the Brazen Buffoon decides to write a book, but becomes so inspired by his own prose that he turns the literary venture into another excuse for a comical crime spree (see "A Hairpin, A Hoe, A Hacksaw, A Hole in the Ground").

So it went into 1950 where, in

Batman #59, the Caped Crimefighter visits the Joker in prison in an attempt to better understand his adversary's odd-ball personality. This piece was the first in a "Batman and Robin travel to the future" series with a wee bit of help from inventor and hypnotist, Professor Carter Nicholes. In the course of their journey, the Daring Duo discover that one of the Joker's descendants in the year 2050 is not only a model citizen, he is Gotham City's chief of police!

A CELIBATE JOKER?

Yet, the idea of *any* descendant springing from the Joker is hard to swallow considering his dearth of feminine companionship through the years. However, in *The Joker* #4, the colorful crook becomes so smitten with a beautiful girl, he actually contemplates marriage. But as luck would have it, his uncooperative bride-to-be is none other than Dinah (Black Canary) Lance. Her boyfriend, Green Arrow, swiftly puts a damper on the Joker's amorous plans.

Since this 1975 story, no other woman has really caught the Crime Clown's evil eye [This was written before the Max Allan Collins Joker/Mime plotline in *Batman* #413.—KD] More's the pity, when one considers the uniqueness of such a tale as opposed to the countless romances enjoyed by comic book heroes. Writers at DC continually pass up golden opportunities by ignoring this intriguing facet of the Joker's personality. They may argue that *no* woman, wicked or otherwise,



The Joker went crazy . . . with his mascara from a Barr/Davis *Detective*.

would want anything to do with such a weird fellow. But if the Joker's potential lover came from a foreign country and was ignorant of his criminal life, it wouldn't be hard for an old con-artist like him to whip up an excuse for his strange features.

DC may feel a romance for such a character is too much for fans to accept. It's a poor argument since other villains have enjoyed romantic encounters without damaging their credibility. Two-Face had Gilda. The Penguin shacked up for a while in *Batman Annual* #11, and even [the old] Lex Luthor had fallen in love in *Action Comics* #s 510-512. True it ended in disaster, but wasn't it a neat twist while it lasted? And if a four-eyed creep like Trigon the Terrible can land a spouse (see *The New Teen Titans* #4), is a girlfriend for the Joker really so outlandish? Besides, an egotistical fellow like him certainly wouldn't risk departing this life without leaving a son or daughter behind to follow in his nefarious footsteps.

I am now forced to open an extremely controversial can of worms. Various writers and artists have insinuated there are no women in the Joker's life because the character is possibly a homosexual. If so, no one until Frank Miller dared to even hint at such a prospect before. Yet, certain stories do tend to back this up. The team of Barr, Davis and Neary showed readers an unmistakably effeminate villain in recent issues of *Detective Comics* (see #s 569-570).

Prudishness aside, an admission of this type concerning one of DC's major characters would be a courageous move on their part. A first, I believe, for the comics industry—that is if the Joker is indeed a homosexual and if the writers can work up the guts to call a spade a spade and quit tip-toeing around the issue.

So, the only remaining argument against a Joker romance is that a lover of any kind goes contrary to the Hateful Harlequin's nature. Agreed. But if crazies don't need occasional affection or human moments, the logical thing for the writers to do is make the Joker a little less crazy in order to make him a little more provocative. But again, this is something which requires tremendous courage.

GUEST VILLAIN: CESAR ROMERO

The 1960s began with the Grinning Jackanapes playing the fool, again. *Detective Comics* #365 is a perfect example of how the Joker was handled during this period. "The House The Joker Built" was written at the peak of the "campy" Batman craze and its influence shows on every page. The hero is portrayed as being barely one step ahead of an idiot. Commissioner Gordon is a befuddled old fogey, and there are enough "Holy—!" exclamations from Robin to gag a maggot.

The plot itself also left a lot to be desired

The Joker's "crime" is catching Batman and Robin on film in order to produce his own TV series. He is about as menacing as a bowl of soggy shredded wheat. When the Dynamic Duo charge the Joker's hideout, they are met by a barrage of gunfire. All the bullets miss their mark for the Joker, by his own admission, instructed his men *not* to harm the crimefighters. "Just knock 'em cold, that's all!" he explains. A far cry from the deranged beast he would become within the pages of *Dark Knight*.

But the height of this "friendly enemy" pattern reached its plateau back in *Batman* #145 in a story called "The Son of the Joker." It was one of those silly epics written by Alfred, Bruce (Batman) Wayne's butler who obviously had nothing better to do on his employer's time. Although it was only an "imaginary tale of the future," it was still disconcerting to see an aged Batman and Joker sitting together, drinking lemonade, and chatting like old war buddies. Such camaraderie wasn't to last very long.

THE DARK JOKER

Once the painfully-bad Batman television series bit the dust in March, 1968, DC Comics made some drastic changes in the Joker; he became more sinister. In August of '68, *World's Finest* #177 offered fans a teasing taste of things to come. "Duel of the Crime Kings" introduced a thoroughly ruthless Joker who didn't actually kill anybody, but it wasn't for lack of trying. He shoots Robin and, with the help of Lex Luthor, would have murdered a henchman if not for the interference of Batman and Superman.

In *Justice League of America* #77, published in December, 1969, the Joker appears for the last time as a fairly harmless antagonist. He was then placed in limbo until 1973 where he finally emerged in *Batman* #251 as the insane killer of old. "The Joker's Five-Way Revenge" was a delight for those comics fans who were tired of the watered-down reprobate they had been forced to endure since 1942. The story begins with the Batman on a dark, rain-swept street finding a body wearing a hideous smile. That rictus grin is courtesy of the lethal Joker-Venom, unused for nearly thirty years. One by one the Joker is murdering his former henchmen—each in a particularly terrifying style. Only one of

the five men should have a reason to fear his ex-employer; it was his betrayal which cast the Joker behind bars. The Mad Mountebank decides to kill all five of them, thereby making certain he nails the traitor. (Who can argue with such logic?)

The Batman arrives barely in time to save the final victim—a frail old man in a wheelchair—whom the Joker is about to feed to a hungry aquarium shark.

As the '70s rolled along, the Joker's depravity knew no bounds. It was as if DC writers were trying to make up for lost time by going completely overboard in regards to the Hoodlum Harlequin's blood-letting. *The Brave and the Bold* #111 finds the Joker wiping out an entire family for no other reason than to show how the underworld "...shall always protect itself!" No longer was he a mere clown. The Joker had again become, in the words of the Batman, a "...mad dog..." As befitting all "mad" things, the crazed clown is treated accordingly. Arkham hospital, an asylum for the criminally insane, became the Joker's new residence in lieu of his former prison abode. It was a home well-suited for him as he steadily grew more violent and evil throughout the decade.

During a two-part stint in *The Brave and the Bold* #s 129-130, the Joker teams up with fellow maniac and Arkham alumnus, Harvey (Two-Face) Dent. Together they attempt the theft of a giant iron eagle which is supposedly stuffed with a king's ransom in gold and precious gems. While enduring a taut chase through the mythical country of Pathanistan, the green-haired ghoul slaughters "...three unarmed shepherds." Again, it seems, just for the sheer hell of it. It takes the combined forces of the Batman, the Green Arrow, as well as the Atom to put the skids to the villains' greedy scheme.

"The Laughing Fish" and "Sign of the Joker" are said by many to be the greatest Joker stories to come out of the 1970s. As the titles indicate, this is a two-parter, published in *Detective Comics* #s 475-476. It begins with a deceptive slowness that builds into a first-rate shocker. Page one finds the Batman immersed in another "Does she or doesn't she know my true identity?" bit as he confronts his amour-of-the-moment, a Ms. Silver St. Cloud. Upon leaving her apartment, by way of his trusty Bat-rope, the Caped Detective hears shrieks coming from a nearby wharf and sees a group of



Joker tries to copyright his fish (as all of us have tried to do at some point in our lives); what some consider the best Joker stories from Englehart/Rogers/Austin stint on *Detective*. Another hint at his homosexuality?

frightened fishermen clutching a basket of macabre "Joker fish." It seems the villainous laughing boy is spiking Gotham Bay with his special venom. Now every slimy sea creature fished from the water bears a chilling resemblance to its pasty-faced "creator."

The next logical step (which shows just how *illogical* and insane the Joker can get) is for the Master of Mayhem to march into the nearest patent office and demand a copyright on his "...little finnies." Of course, he is immediately turned down, after which the Jeering Jester threatens death within twelve hours to an understandably confused patent clerk. Part one ends with a furious Batman and Commissioner Gordon listening to the taunts of a triumphant Joker via a flickering TV set. The body of the luckless clerk is sprawled eerily in the foreground; a victim of Joker-Venom in gas form. *Detective* #476 wraps everything up beautifully as the Ace of Knives plunges from a steel girder to seemingly certain death (again!) in the river below.

Borrowing an old trick from the 1940s, writer Steve Englehart makes this story all the more hair-raising by having the Joker announce his killings in advance, an eccentricity many readers wish would be returned to the Crime Clown's repertoire. Artists Terry Austin and Marshall Rogers add to an already great piece by bathing certain scenes in grim shadows that are sometimes soft, sometimes stark, and giving the Joker a face usually reserved for nightmares.

In 1975, the Joker received his own comic book series titled simply *The Joker*. It ran a brief nine issues before going bellyup in the summer of '76. The reasons for its failure are clear to anyone familiar with the villain. Although some of the stories were quite good (#1 and #7, for instance), the noble efforts of writer Denny O'Neil to make an evil character the "star" proved futile. Without a Batman to help keep things in balance, coupled with Joker's inability to break out of his one-dimensional villainy, the tales went from bad to worse. It was, admitted O'Neil in an interview in *Amazing World of DC Comics* -41, "...about the most difficult thing I've had to do. We are dealing with a...thorough and unregenerated villain..." who "...the reader has to admire on some level..."

In spite of the many talents connected with *The Joker*, it sank miserably. Sadly, it might have

worked but for the previous writers who succeeded all too well in making the Joker so completely devoid of morals or compassion. Then, came the 1980s.

Nine years after his ghoulish appearance in *The Brave and the Bold* #111, the Joker, in #191 of the same title, did an abrupt about-face, albeit a temporary one. A story entitled "Only Angels Have Wings" puts the Batman and his long-time adversary in the ironic position of working together to solve the Penguin's murder. After failing to find the guilty party on his own, a desperate Joker seeks out his greatest enemy and asks for help.

"What's in it for you?" an ever-suspicious Batman demands.

"Revenge..." explains the Joker. "I was fond of the little fowl!"

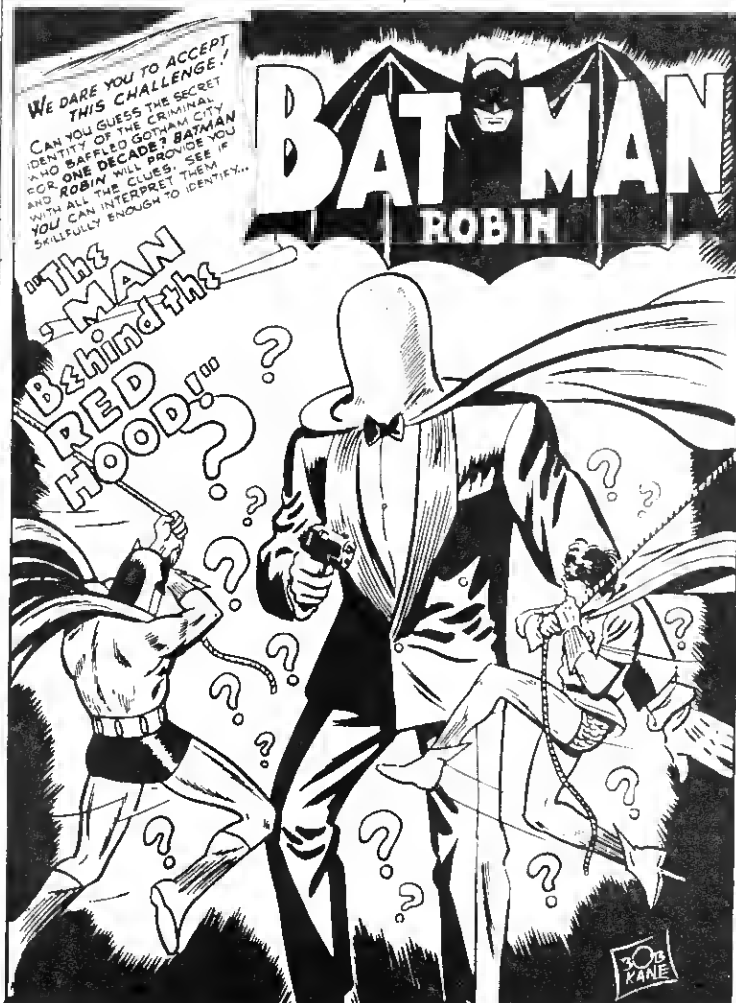
Throughout this tale, readers continually expect the old Joker double-cross. While he does pull a few tricks on his reluctant co-worker—a close call with a career-

ing taxi, a bucket of acid atop a door—Batman's instincts tell him the Joker might actually be playing it straight for once. When the villain breaks down and openly weeps beside the Penguin's coffin, the startled hero is further convinced of his foe's sincerity. Soon after, the Batman solves the case by discovering it was all a Penguin ploy to kidnap a cardinal of the Catholic Church and hold him for ransom. Surprisingly, it is the Joker who captures the resurrected Birdman of Banditry and holds him until his "partner" can slap on the Bat-cuffs.

"I never thought I'd say this," admits a grateful Batman at story's end. "...good work, Joker!"

Apparently, it was "good work" on the part of writers Dan Mishkin and Gary Cohn for this yarn produced more positive mail than any other *Brave and Bold* team-up. It wasn't so much that Batman and the Joker worked together: several stories years before found them on the same

In *Detective Comics* #168 we get a hint of the Joker's true identity: he only wanted a million dollars and wound up immersed in a chemical vat.



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side. But rather, it was the novelty of the Joker having no other motive save that of avenging his "murdered" friend. A hint, perhaps, a tiny spark, of good buried within the Prince of Pranksters after all.

As recently as *Detective Comics* #s 569-570, the Joker's ever-changing personality took another turn. Although he stole, kidnapped and generally raised hell, the Mirthful Mountebank didn't murder a soul. Truth to tell, his homicidal nature is being played down considerably of late. Can it mean another phase in the Joker's "career" is approaching? If so, it is the hope of this fan that past mistakes are not repeated.

For some, a less-gruesome villain would be more than welcome, but a careful balance *must* be maintained lest comicdom's favorite fiend again regresses into the silly buffoon of thirty years earlier. Time will tell.

JOKER A LA MILLER

I have so far touched little upon the *Dark Knight* Graphic Novel in which the Joker played a prominent part. This book has already been critiqued to death and there isn't much to add. Chapter three of Frank Miller's four-part saga is definitely the most haunting Batman vs. Joker story ever written. The Killer Clown is at his brutal best. His grisly suicide and cremation are guaranteed to freeze the blood of all but the most stoic among us. *Dark Knight* is something no lover of Joker mythos will soon forget.

With the 50th anniversary of the clown-faced criminal's creation approaching (Spring, 1990), a curious puzzle remains:

Just who IS the Joker?

A good question. A question DC honchos have been strangely reluctant to answer. Despite a recent wave of pleas to reveal the Joker's identity, the powers-that-be are silent. There was a story published in 1951 called "The Man Behind the Red Hood" (*Detective Comics* #168), but its information is vague at best. In it, a captured Joker confesses he was once a normal-looking individual who simply decided to steal one million dollars. Immersion in a chemical vat during the course of a robbery gave the future Clown of Crime his bizarre countenance.

Makes sense, but there are far too many loose ends. Why, for example, the sudden need for an exorbitant amount of money? The Joker claim-



Anybody who doesn't know what this is from: welcome out of your cave.

ed he wanted it to retire on. Retirement at such an early age? His boundless energy and nimble mind indicate he is not a lazy man. And if retirement was his *sole* aim, why start a brand new crime career once his felonious fortune was obtained? Some how the Joker's lame explanation just doesn't ring true. There is also the mystery surrounding his life *prior* to the Red Hood origin. It seems even the mighty detective skills of the Batman himself cannot solve that one.

What dark secrets lurk in the shadowy past of the infamous Ace of Knaves? Devout Joker-fans have waited almost half a century to find out. How anti-climactic it would be if such a tale remained untold. Yet it is this tantalizing aura of secrecy which makes the Joker so intriguing. Might that aura be forever shattered if the Mad Jester's past is suddenly forced into the cruel light of day? Perhaps. But DC writers have taken bold risks with other characters before. If they can wipe out

entire universes, surely the revelation of the Joker's true identity can't be too tough a nut to crack. Hopefully, DC Comics is merely awaiting the big 5-0 before revealing all. And should this be the case, I can think of no better way of rewarding the many fans who helped make the Joker one of the most popular comic book villains of all time. ●





You see kids what happens when you pull practical jokes. You destroy your enemies. uh. Don't try this at home, including wearing an outfit like that.

The Joker Checklist

Batman

- #1 Spring, 1940 1st Joker story is untitled, 2nd—"The Joker Returns!"
- #2 Summer, 1940 Untitled
- #4 Spring, 1941 "The Case of the Joker's Crime Circus!"
- #5 Winter, 1941 "The Riddle of the Missing Card!"
- #7 Oct-Nov 1942 Untitled
- #8 Dec-Jan 1941-42 "The Cross Country Crimes!"
- #9 Feb-March 1942 "The Case of the Lucky Law-Breakers!"
- #11 Jun-July 1942 Untitled
- #12 Aug-Sep 1942 "The Wizard of Words!"
- #13 Oct-Nov 1942 "Comedy of Tears!"
- #16 April-May 1943 "The Joker Reforms!"
- #19 Oct-Nov 1943 "The Case of the Timid Lion!"
- #20 Dec-Jan 1943-44 "The Centuries of Crime!"
- #23 Jun-July 1944 "The Upside Down Crimes!"
- #25 Oct-Nov 1944 "Knight of Knavery!"
- #28 April-May 1945 "Shadow City!"
- #32 Dec-Jan 1945-46 "Rackety-Rax Racket!"
- #37 Oct-Nov 1946 "The Joker

Follows Suit!"

- #40 April-May 1947 "The 13 Club!"
- #44 Dec-Jan 1947-48 "Gamble with Doom!"
- #46 April-May 1948 "Guileful Greetings!" or "The Joker Sends Regards!"
- #52 April-May 1949 "The Happy Victims!"
- #53 Jun-July 1949 "A Hairpin, A Hoe, A Hacksaw, A Hole in the Ground!"
- #55 Oct-Nov 1949 "The Case of the 48 Jokers"
- #57 Feb-March 1950 "The Funny Man Crimes!"
- #59 Jun-July 1950 "Batman in the Future!"
- #63 Feb-March 1951 "The Joker's Crime Costumes!"
- #66 Aug-Sep 1951 "The Joker's Comedy of Errors!"
- #67 Oct-Nov 1951 "The Man Who Wrote the Joker's Jokes!"
- #73 Oct-Nov 1952 "The Joker's Utility Belt!"
- #74 Dec-Jan 1952-53 "The Crazy Crime Clown!"
- #85 August 1954 "Batman—Clown of Crime!"
- #86 September 1954 "The Joker's Winning Team!"
- #87 October 1954 "Batman's Greatest Thrills!"
- #97 February 1956 "The Joker Announces Danger!"
- #110 September 1957 "Crime-of-the-Month Club!"
- #123 April 1959 "The Joker's Practical Jokes!"

- #127 October 1959 "Batman's Super-Partner!"
- #136 December 1960 "Challenge of the Joker!"
- #140 June 1961 "The Ghost of the Joker!"
- #144 December 1961 "The Man Who Played Batman!"
- #145 February 1962 "The Son of the Joker!"
- #148 June 1962 "The Joker's Greatest Triumph!"
- #152 December 1962 "The False-Face Society!"
- #159 November 1963 "The Great Clayface-Joker Feud!"
- #163 May 1964 "The Joker Jury!"
- #186 November 1966 "The Joker's Original Robberies"
- #201 May 1968 "Batman's Gangland Guardians!"
- #251 September 1973 "The Joker's Five-Way Revenge!"
- #260 February 1975 "This One'll Kill You, Batman!"
- #286 April 1977 "The Joker's Playground of Peril!"
- #291 September 1977 "Where Were You on the Night Batman was Killed?—Testimony of the Catwoman."
- #292 October 1977 "Testimony of the Riddler."
- #293 November 1977 "Testimony of Lex Luthor!"
- #294 December 1977 "Testimony of the Joker!"
- #321 March 1980 "Dreadful Birthday, Dear Joker!"
- #353 November 1982 "Last Laugh."
- #365 November 1983 "Ruins."

#366 December 1983 "The Joker is Wild!"
 #400 October 1986 "Resurrection Night!"
 #408 June 1987 "Did Robin Die Tonight?"

Batman vs. The Incredible Hulk (DC Special Series)

Vol. 5 #27 September 1981 "The Monster and the Madman!"

The Brave and the Bold

#68 Oct-Nov 1966 "Alias The Bat-Hulk!"
 #111 March 1974 "Death has the Last Laugh!"
 #118 April 1975 "May the Best Man Die!"
 #129 September 1976 "The Claws of the Emperor Eagle!"
 #130 October 1976 "Death at Rainbow's End!"
 #191 October 1982 "Only Angels Have Wings!"
 #200 July 1983 "Smell of Brimstone, Stench of Death!"

Challenge!

#7 May 1986 "Don't Bogart That Grape... Hand Me The Gas Pump!"
 #8 June 1986 "If This is Love, Why Do My Teeth Hurt?"

Crisis On Infinite Earths

#2 May 1985 "Time and Time Again!"
 #9 December 1985 "War Zone."

The Dark Knight

#1 April 1986 "The Dark Knight Returns."
 #2 May 1986 "Dark Knight Triumphant."
 #3 June 1986 "Hunt the Dark Knight."
 #4 September 1986 "The Dark Knight Falls."

DC Comics Presents

#41 January 1982 "The Terrible Tinseltown Treasure-Trap Treachery!"

DC Graphic Novel

Issue number unknown at this time.
 "Killing Joke."

Detective

#45 November 1940 "The Case of the Laughing Death!"
 #60 February 1942 "Case of the Costume-Clad Killers!"

#62 April 1942 "Laugh, Town, Laugh!"

#69 November 1942 "The Harlequin's Hoax!"

#71 January 1943 "A Crime a Day!"

#76 June 1943 "Slay 'em with Flowers!"

#91 September 1944 "The Case of the Practical Joker."

#102 August 1946 "The House That Was Held For Ransom!"

#109 March 1946 "The House That Jokes Built!"

#114 August 1946 "Arcostic of Crime!"

#118 December 1946 "The Royal Flush Crimes!"

#124 June 1947 "The Crime Parade!"

#137 July 1948 "The Rebus Crimes!"

#138 August 1948 "The Invisible Crimes!"

#149 July 1949 "The Sound-Effects Crimes!"

#168 February 1951 "The Man Behind the Red Hood!"

#180 February 1952 "The Joker's Millions!"

#193 March 1953 "The Joker's Journal!"

#332 October 1964 "The Joker's Last Laugh!"

#341 July 1965 "The Joker's Comedy Capers!"

#365 July 1967 "The House the Joker Built!"

#388 June 1969 "Public Luna-tic Number One!"

#475 February 1978 "The Laughing Fish!"

#476 April 1978 "Sign of the Joker!"

#504 July 1981 "The Joker's Rumpus Room Revenge!"

#526 May 1983 "All My Enemies Against Me."

#532 November 1983 "Laugh, Killer, Laugh!"

#566 September 1986 "Know Your Foes."

#569 December 1986 "Catch as Catscan."

#570 January 1987 "The Last Laugh!"

The Joker

#1 May 1975 "The Joker's Double Jeopardy!"

#2 July 1975 "The Sad Saga of Willy the Weeper!"

#3 October 1975 "The Last Ha Ha!"

#4 December 1975 "A Gold Star for the Joker!"

#5 February 1976 "The Joker Goes Wilde!"

#6 April 1976 "Sherlock Stalks the Joker!"

#7 June 1976 "Luthor-You're Driving Me Sane!"

#8 August 1976 "The Scarecrow's Fearsome Face-Off!"

#9 October 1976 "The Cat and the Clown!"

Justice League of America

#77 December 1969 "Snapper Carr-Super Traitor!"

#136 November 1976 "Crisis on Earth-S!"

Strange Sports

#10 December 1976 "The Great Super-Star Game!"

Super Powers

#1 "Power Beyond Price!"

#2 August 1984 "Clash Against Chaos!"

#4 October 1984 "Earth's Last Stand!"

#5 November 1984 "Spaceship Earth!"

Superman

#9 June 1987 "To Laugh and Die in Metropolis"

The Untold Legend of Batman

#1 July 1980 "In the Beginning!"

#2 August 1980 "With Friends Like These..."

#3 September 1980 "The Man Behind the Mask!"

Wonder Woman

#281 July 1981 "Always Leave 'em Laughing."

#282 August 1981 "First Laugh..."

#283 September 1981 "...Last Laugh!"

World's Finest

#19 Fall 1945 "The League for Larceny!"

#48 Oct-Nov 1950 "Song of Crime!"

#59 July-Aug 1952 "The Joker's Aces!"

#61 Nov-Dec 1952 "The Crimes of Batman!"

#88 May-June 1957 "Superman and Batman's Greatest Foes!"

#129 November 1962 "Joker-Luthor, Incorporated!"

#136 September 1963 "The Batman Noody Remembered!"

#156 March 1966 "The Federation of Bizarro Idiots!"

#166 May 1967 "The Danger of the Deadly Duo!"

#177 August 1968 "Duel of the Crime Kings!"

DOC'S BOOKSHELF

The Strange Case of Dr. Wertham

by Dwight R. Decker

If you were a newly-minted comic book fan in the '60s, where did you go first for information about the field? Probably the public library. In all likelihood, you would find encyclopedia articles and maybe a scant few books on cartoons and cartooning, all concentrating on comic strips and shrugging off comic books with barely a mention as some kind of illegitimate off-spring of true comic art not to be mentioned in polite company. If your library was very good, it might have a copy of Jules Feiffer's *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, a 1965 collection of Golden Age super-hero stories framed by Feiffer's nostalgic remarks. For a beginning fan, it was a wonderful introduction to the world of comic books.

If your library wasn't so enlightened, the only book it would have about comic books would be Dr. Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1954). It wasn't so wonderful. In fact, it was a blistering attack on comic books that accused them of just about every imaginable sin. To hear Dr. Wertham tell it, comic books corrupted America's youth and turned impressionable children into juvenile delinquents. The book made for depressing reading, though it was quickly obvious that the comic-book industry Wertham wrote about was a different place from the one circa 1967. Other than for Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, super-heroes are barely discussed: most of the book blasts ultra-violent crime comic books,



"Stomping on the face is a form of brutality which modern children learn early," was the caption for this panel in *Seduction of the Innocent*: Examples out of context to suit needs, much like modern-day evangelists.

shockingly guresome horror comic books, sexually suggestive romance comic books, and dismayingly racist jungle comic books. In short, whole genres of comic books that were either extinct by 1967 or, like romance comics, had faded to tame insignificance.

If you went on to start getting comics fanzines, amateur publications put out by fans to share information on the history and lore of comic books, you soon learned that if comic books were different now from what they were in the early '50s, Dr. Wertham and his book were in no small way responsible. Faced with what amounted to a nationwide anti-comics crusade given devastating ammunition by *Seduction of the Innocent*, fearful comic-book publishers banded together to form the Comics Code Authority, in effect censoring themselves before some government agency was set up to do it for them or simply banned them outright. Many publishers did not survive the

bad publicity and subsequent crash, made worse by the collapse of a major magazine distributor for completely unrelated causes and by increasing competition from TV. EC Comics in particular, fondly remembered by many fans for its horror and science-fiction comic books that were a cut above the competition, and who was forced to suspend its entire line except for a humor title called *Mad*, which was upgraded to magazine format to avoid the Code.

Fans do not remember Dr. Wertham fondly. Comics fandom took shape years after the mid-'50s crash, of course, and most fans were too young to remember it personally, but for many of them Dr. Wertham took on almost legendary proportions. He was the man who had killed EC, brought on the Comics Code, and turned comic books into pabulum meant for children. Perhaps he came to symbolize every parent, every teacher who had ever tried to take your comic books away from

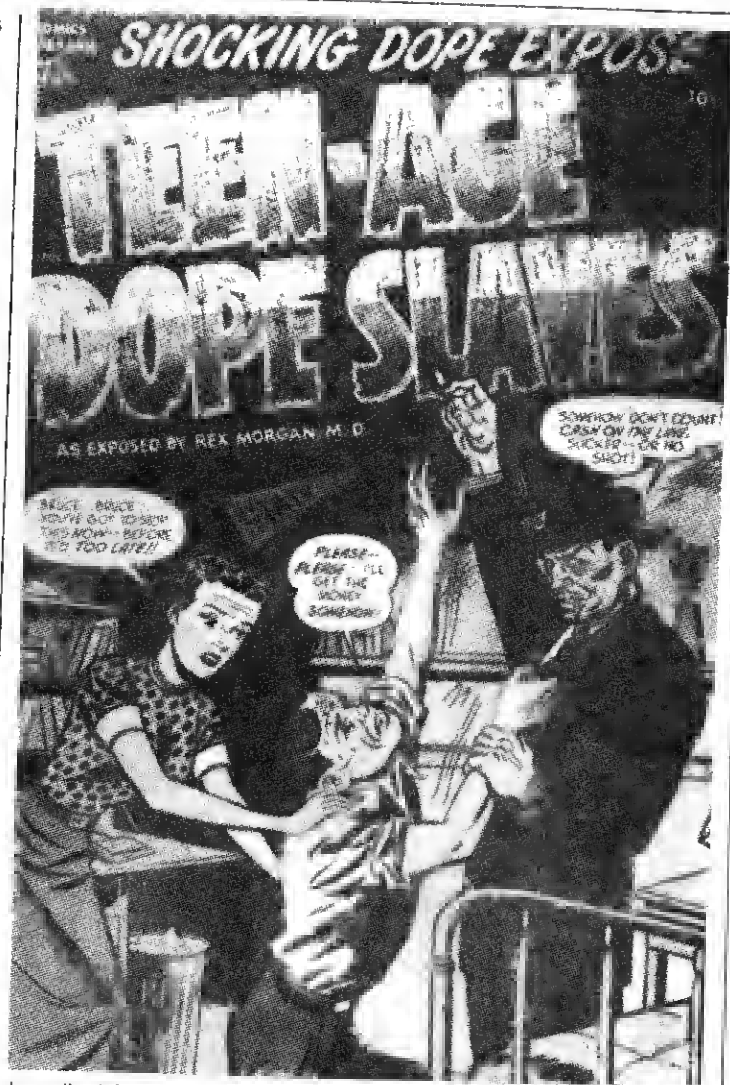
you for your own good. For fans who became politically aware, hearing "repression" and "1950s" in the same breath led them to automatically associate Dr. Wertham with Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Writing in the 1979 edition of the *Overstreet's Comic Book Price Guide*, Carl Macek remarked that Wertham's arguments were heard in an atmosphere and paranoia created, in part, by the Cold War and the Black-list, witch-hunting days of McCarthyism." You could almost assume that Wertham and McCarthy sat up late nights to plot strategy together.

That, in any case, is how Dr. Wertham is remembered by comics fans, and as the years go by, as fewer fans have actually read his book or are familiar with the comic books he criticized, the more the myth of his unique diabolism grows. The reasons for his anti-comics campaign are forgotten and he has become a caricature of everything a comics fan hates and fears most.

As it happens, the background behind Wertham is more complicated than is remembered, and in some ways it's a little strange. Far from being the vile, malignant enemy of comics fans everywhere, he seems to have grown rather fond of us in his later years, and his last book was a kindly, if badly, confused effort to do something nice for us.

So how did a distinguished psychiatrist and author get mixed up with comic books in the first place? A brief run-down of his professional career may be in order here. According to his obituary in the *New York Times* (December 1, 1981), he was born in Munich, Germany in 1895. I have heard but can't confirm that his name was originally Friedrich Wertheim and later mildly Anglicized. He would have been 19 when World War I broke out, but whether he saw service with the German Army is not known. He studied at Kings College in London and at the Universities of Munich and Erlangen, and received his MD from the University of Wurzburg in 1921. He did post-graduate study in London, Vienna, and Paris, and a correspondence with Sigmund Freud led him to take up psychiatry as his life's work. He came to the United States in 1922 and settled here, becoming a citizen in 1927. By any standard, his list of credentials and professional associations is impressive, including the posts of senior psychiatrist for the New York City Department of Hospitals, and director of the mental hygiene clinics



Juvenile delinquency and comic books: an excuse for neglectful parents. From Harvey Comics Library #1: Certainly no *Crackbusters* (but what is?).

at Bellevue Hospital and later Queens General Hospital. He was also director of the Lafargue Clinic in Harlem, a mental hygiene clinic for poor blacks; this at a time when the prevailing opinion was still that blacks were too cheerful and happy-go-lucky to need any attention to their mental well-being. In fact, his *American Journal of Psychotherapy* article, "Psychological Effects of School Segregation," was submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court as an important piece of evidence in the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* case that led to the 1954 ruling declaring school segregation unconstitutional.

Where Dr. Wertham made his name was as a consulting psychiatrist for the court system. As the *New York Times* wrote, the psychiatric clinic he directed for the Court of General Sessions in New

York City "was believed to be the first clinic in the United States in which all convicted felons received a psychiatric examination that was turned over to the court."...observing in 1938 that criminal court trials often took no heed of the obvious need for psychiatric examination and treatment of offenders, he also cited the lack of modern medical and identification at such facilities as Bellevue Hospital and Rockland State Hospital. These and other similar criticisms eventually led modernization of facilities and methodology at many mental and criminal holding institutions."

Wertham's books show his narrowing focus. His first book was *The Brain as an Organ* (1934), a straightforward scientific work. *Dark Legend* (1941), however, was a psychological case history of a 17-year-old boy who murdered his

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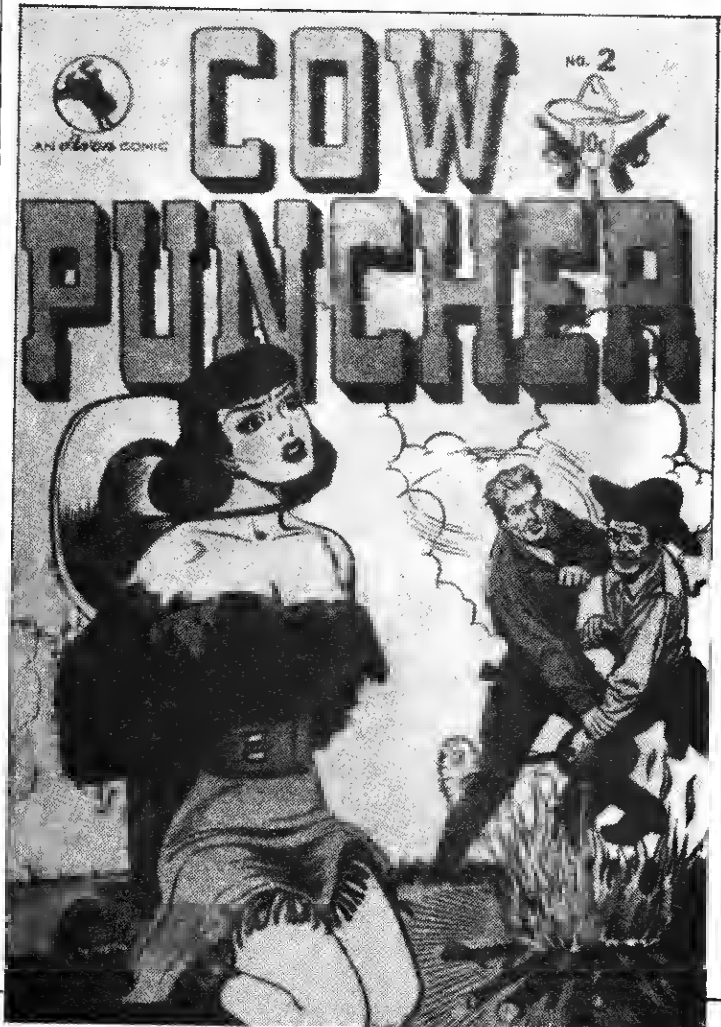
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mother, written for a more general audience and with literary allusions. The reviews were generally favorable, although an MD referred to "slips and inconsistencies which definitely mar the book as a scientific study." Criticisms of sloppy writing would dog every book Wertham wrote. His 1949 book, *Show of Violence*, is a general study of murder in which he discusses some of the major murder cases he was involved with as either a court witness or a consultant. One of them was the ghastly Albert Fish case, which Wertham felt was a miscarriage of justice. Fish, who had raped, tortured, and murdered a large number of children, was convicted of the murder of a 12-year-old girl he had then eaten, and he was promptly electrocuted. Wertham contended that Fish was demonstrably insane and should have been institutionalized, and the ruling that he was sane enough to stand trial was a politically-motivated sop to a community outraged by his crimes and fearful he might end up being set free. "Executing him did the community no good," Wertham would later write, "though considering what Fish did to the children he preyed on, I suspect there may be grounds to disagree." In any event, we begin to see the outlines of Wertham's main thesis in *Show of Violence*: that crimes of violence are largely motivated by environmental factors. In particular, murder is an index to the state of the society in which it occurs, and its large incidence in our society indicates a general callous disregard for human dignity and human life. Wertham's participation in the Fish case also gave him the professional standing to be paid attention to when he took off after comic books.

Parents and educators had been grumping about comic books for years. As early as December, 1940, when comic books were still in their infancy, the *National Education Association Journal* ran an article discussing an "antidote to the Comic Magazine Poison." Dr. Wertham ran into comic books in the course of his work with juvenile offenders, and noting that many of the delinquents read them avidly, concluded that they were important environmental factors leading the kids to crime and violence. He presented his case in an article published in the May 29, 1947 issue of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and after that he was off and running in his crusade against violent comic books. Over the next seven years he would give lectures, write articles, and testify as an expert witness before legislative committees investigating the comic-book menace, culminating in the publication of his book *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954.

Latterday comics fans who look back at the anti-comics crusade with fear and loathing, and fret nervously over whether it might happen again, tend to ignore the point that comics publishers of the early '50s virtually cut their own throats. While Wertham overstated his case to a sometimes ludicrous degree, he didn't have to: comic books were as crude, violent, and tasteless as he claimed, as any parent or legislator could easily confirm. With the post-war eclipse of costume heroes, comic books moved into increasingly violent and graphic crime and horror, although from the vantage point of hindsight, it seems obvious the publishers should have realized as early as 1947 and the *Saturday Review* series of articles that there could be trouble with public reaction if things got out of hand in what they printed. Parents and legislators were worried enough about children seeing pictures of endless murders and mutilations and severed body

Teaching kids bad guys tie up women (Note shape of branding iron): From *Cow Puncher* #2 (Avon 1947). This cover and above *Zoot* by Jack Kamen.





SOTI caption: "An invitation to learning," about floosies and bad guys.

parts in comics that were anything but fuzzy bunny books; then a distinguished psychiatrist came along and told them exactly what they had suspected all along—yes, crime comic books became hardened to violence, even accepted it as a useful problem-solving device. Comic books taught them to be cruel, sexually warped, dishonest, and contemptuous of soft virtues like pity or love. In 1947, comic books were still relatively mild, but some publishers lost all restraint into the '50s, running increasingly violent and gory stories that only confirmed everything Wertham said. In a way, the publishers committed suicide.

Seduction of the Innocent is a remarkable book. Like most of Wertham's publications, it is short on proof of its assertions, and long on polemics, anecdotes related without any sources cited, and literary quotations or allusions crowbarred into the text. Several generations of comics fans have had a chance to discover the book and react to it now, and everything you've heard about it is probably true. He does accuse Superman of being a fascist, Batman and Robin of being a homosexual fantasy of a man and a boy living together, and Wonder Woman of being just plain kinky (judging from the early years of that strip, with all the emphasis on bondage and submission, I'd have to say he called that one pretty well). He does make the claim that comic-book drawings contain "pictures within pictures" for "those who know how to look," his Exhibit A being a man's shoulder that supposedly elicits a woman's naked torso when squinted at right. (Here Wertham was trying too hard to find sins and abominations. Playful comic-book artists have occasionally slipped in hidden naughty words, and Eclipse just reprinted an old and

otherwise innocuous strip featuring the adventures of "Toni Gay" and her chum "Butch Dykeman," but no one, then or now, has ever confessed to inserting "pictures in pictures" in line with Wertham's charge. It's difficult to see how readers could even find the hidden drawings if they were as obscure as he indicates, and it's even more difficult to imagine anyone getting a secret thrill out of the shading of a man's shoulder muscles.) Wertham does badly misinterpret a few stories, notably the EC one in which some overly patriotic citizens beat a man to death for not saluting the flag, only to discover at the end he was blind and couldn't see it; Wertham claimed the story favored rough treatment of insufficiently patriotic individuals, missing the point of a pretty heavyhanded story so completely that a suspicion of willful dishonesty seems justified. In the same vein, a reproduced panel of a milkman discovering the body of a dead woman is captioned to the effect that she was raped and murdered. Murdered, yes, but nothing implies rape, which is Wertham's gratuitous addition. (Then again, he did work on the Fish case, which may account for his automatic assumption of a sexual angle in any violent crime against women.)

Seduction is in large part a dreary recital of one juvenile crime after another, juxtaposed with descriptions of horrible examples of the "crime comic books" that supposedly led to such behavior. "Crime comic book" is Wertham's blanket term for any book that dealt with the theme of good guys and bad guys, heroes and villains, while modern usage of the term would restrict it to just the now-extinct genre of cops-and-gangster comic books of the pre-Code era. It's a little startling to see Wertham refer to *Wonder Woman* as "a crime comic which we have found to be one of the most harmful," since today we would simply regard it as a super-hero comic book and certainly not one to be taken very seriously. Other passages in *Seduction* are little short of incredible, as when Wertham explains the difference between comic books and "good stories and novels" to a "ten-year-old girl from a cultivated and literate home." "'Supposing,' I told her, 'you get used to eating sandwiches made with very strong seasonings, with onions and peppers and highly spiced mustard. You will lose your taste for simple bread and butter and for finer food. The same is true for reading comic books.'"

The highlight comes when Wertham assures an anguished mother that it wasn't her fault her son got into trouble: "'You have done all that you could... But the influence of a good home is frustrated if it is not supported by the other influences children are exposed to—the comic books, the crime programs and all that. Adult influences work against them. We have studied that, and we know good parents when we see them. So don't worry about yourself. It's not your fault.'"

Wertham's concrete suggestions for what to do about comic books were a little skimpy. Besides increased parental vigilance at home, he seemed to have in mind legal prohibition of sales of violent comic books to minors. In a sense, he can be seen as one of the first proponents of some kind of rating system. Although fans later remembered him as the man responsible for bringing on the Comics Code Authority, he never supported or endorsed the Code, and had no faith in the ability of comic-book publishers to police their own ranks.

Excerpts from *Seduction of the Innocent* appeared in *Reader's Digest* and the *Ladies Home Journal*, where it probably achieved its maximum impact on parents. The book itself appeared to generally favorable reviews, including one by prominent sociologist C. Wright Mills in the *New York Times*. Some reviewers, however, qualified their praise. The *Atlantic's* reviewer wrote that "Wertham has assembled much interesting material and he makes a telling case for legal regulation of the so-called crime comics. His report, unfortunately, is rather clumsily written and highly repetitious." *Library Journal* thought Wertham was basically right but added that he seemed to overstate his case. Wolcott Gibbs remarked in *The New Yorker* that "in many ways, it is an absurd and alarmful book, full of examples

"Treating the police contemptuously is a comic-book commonplace."



of the psychiatrist's peculiar gift for referring all abnormal behavior to one special stimulus, but the concrete evidence it offers of a real crime against the children seems to be practically unanswerable. I like to think that Superman and his pals are up against the battle of their perverse, fantastic, and foolish lives." *The New Republic* offered the observation that Dr. Wertham's high-pitched argument is a tissue of troublesome points. His interview materials are presented with the scantest apparatus of criticism. . . . At best, reviewers thought Wertham had presented his arguments poorly or felt that comic books were to trivial to worry about; virtually no one spoke up in defense of comic books themselves.

Comics fans have tended to cast Wertham as an intolerant demagogue leading a lynch mob of little old ladies in tennis shoes against a small, helpless, and beleaguered group of writers, artists, and publishers whose crime was to try to entertain people. Wertham saw himself differently, as a lone, courageous voice speaking out against the brutalization of children by rapacious big-business interest. He claimed, in private correspondence years later, that the multimillionaire comic book publishers did everything they could to squelch him and his book, from hiring private detectives to tail him in the hopes of getting something on him, to exerting muscle to kill an important book-club deal for *Seduction*. One thing that is definitely known is that after the book was published, Holt, Reinhart, & Winston had second thoughts about the two-page bibliography of comic book publishers at the end and ordered it razor-bladed out of the printed copies. A few intact copies did slip through, however, for whatever good they did.

Interestingly, Wertham's entry in the 1954-55 *Who's Who In America* includes a listing among his published works of a book with the title *All Our Innocences* (1953). Later editions put *Seduction of the Innocence* in its place. *Seduction* must have been still in the writing stage when Wertham filled out the *Who's Who* questionnaire, only it had a different working title (and an optimistic projected press date). It isn't hard to see which is the more marketable title.

Besides Wertham's book, comic book publishers were also confronted with the U.S. Senate and New York State Legislature hearings in



Another example of nasty crooks treating police contemptuously.

1954. Alarmed, the publishers formed the Comics Magazine Association of America, which went into operation in early September, and the first books bearing the Comics Code seal were appearing on the stands shortly thereafter. And wouldn't you know it: in early February, Dr. Wertham was already testifying before a New York State Legislature committee hearing that comic books were no better under the Code. As proof, he exhibited a whip and a knife he had obtained through ads in a Code-approved book.

Whether he cared to admit it or not, there had been some changes. Consider listings in the *New York Times Index* over several years as a barometer of the controversy over violent comic books. In 1953, the entries take up barely an inch, and include such items as disabled American POWs released by the North Koreans craving comic books and St. John issuing a book printed in 3-D. For 1954, the listings balloon to about 12½ inches, replete with articles reporting legislative hearings over banning comic books and discussions of whether they cause juvenile delinquency. In March, Communists burn "decadent" U.S. books, including *Donald Duck*; in Berlin, Wertham's book is reviewed in April, and in November, Prime Minister Winston Churchill is reading horror comics to weigh the need for a ban in Great Britain. In 1955, the listings are a shade longer, and among the news items are reports that several countries, including Britain, India, and West Germany, have announced bans on the import of offensive comic books. For 1956, however, the listing shrinks drastically to just 2½ inches. Dr. Wertham is still claiming in February that comic books have a role in "prompting" juvenile crime,

but in September, the Republican National Committee announces it will issue presidential campaign material in comic-book form. You can't get much more respectable than that, and the heat was off a considerably shrunken comic-book industry.

Meanwhile, Dr. Wertham had other fish to fry. The year 1956 saw publication of his book *Circle of Guilt*, a study of juvenile delinquency that focused on the well-publicized case of the murder of a "clean-cut model boy" by a young Puerto Rican. In it, Wertham stated his belief that juvenile delinquency stemmed "not from the fact that children neglect their duties, but from the fact that we violate their rights: the rights to health, to education and to protection." Curiously, *Saturday Review*, the magazine where the comic-book crusade could be said to have started nearly a decade before, ran a review by Albert Deutsch that neatly sums up Wertham's entire professional career as well as this particular book: "When he gets off his comic-book kick, Dr. Wertham makes some trenchant remarks on racial segregation and other social problems. Yet even these points are vitiated by the author's perplexing bent for truculence and bellicosity. Which is a pity, since Dr. Wertham is undoubtedly a man with sensitive social conscience, deeply concerned about the well-being of children."

And so we leave Dr. Fredric Wertham at the close of his long and generally successful career. If he hadn't won a total victory over "crime comics" he had certainly helped tame the beast and he could retire with the satisfaction of a job well done.

However, deep within the pages of *Seduction of the Innocent* lay ticking a timebomb that would go off during what should have been his quiet retirement years. In *Seduction*, he had written: "I have known many adults who have treasured throughout their lives some of the books they read as children. I have never come across any adult or adolescent who had outgrown comic-book reading who would ever dream of keeping any of these 'books' for any sentimental or other reason." He apparently didn't think it was even possible. That conclusion would prove to be an embarrassing mistake.

Next issue we'll see what happened when Dr. Wertham came across a 17-year-old comic-book fan named Dwight Decker. ●

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—Harlan Ellison (the real one), writer and hell-raiser.

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The Last Round-up

PART I



COMICS in review

by Gerard Jones

[Part I!? Yes. Since Gerry put so much of his heart and filet into his final review, it ran long. So we'll be running it in two installments. Ya gotta love him.—KD]

Well, gang, I guess this is it. It's been fun, but it's time for old Gerry to mosey down the trail. You see, I have this voice in my head that says a fellow shouldn't be a writer of comic books and a critic of comic books at the same time. And, with the debut of *The Trouble with Girls* from Malibu Comics any day now, I'm going to be popping up monthly as a funny-book writer. It looks like there'll be more after that, from Malibu and elsewhere, and, frankly, I don't want to wonder if I'm compromising my job as a critic with any ulterior motives for self-promotion

or damage to the competition. So my days as a critic have drawn to a close, at least for now.

To tell you the truth, I never really planned to stay in this line of work forever. I've had to make some cuts in my writing assignments. But the reviewing was something I felt I had to do, at least for a while.

I'm fascinated by this medium, and find myself drawn into it more strongly all the time; but, at least as of last fall, I didn't really feel I knew it well enough. When Mark Waid asked me to write some reviews, I saw it as an opportunity to force myself to learn about comics, to analyze what makes them work and what makes them fail, to discover why they exert such a hold over me, and to make some guesses at where the medium might be going. Oh, I know what you're saying. It's pretty damned arrogant to play critic when

you're only just learning the stuff yourself. Maybe it is. Wanna make something of it? (Look, I did my *Annual Gerard Jones Guilt Trip Special* a couple of months ago, so that's enough of that, all right?)

Certainly there've been some inconsistencies, some dramatic flip-flops in my standards (did I really suggest that a run-of-the-mill *Avengers* was far better than *Particle Dreams*? Well, yeah, I *liked* the *Avengers* a lot more personally, but we've got to give original visions their due). But that's all part of the fun. Who wants a critic you can always second-guess? If nothing else, I've tried to keep things varied and entertaining here. (Hey, if smart-ass anecdotes get old, try some maudlin hand-wringing and tooth-gnashing. If that doesn't work, try playing Mr. Nice Guy.) And I've tried to keep all my reviews straight-from-the-heart and spontaneous. Although usually that's only because I haven't had time to do rewrites.

So it was good for me. Was it good for you?

At the end of my six months here, I find the comic book medium even more fascinating, odd, perplexing, exciting than before. It's a troubled medium, but it's a vital one. Whatever its limitations, it is full of people devoted to it, and that may keep it alive despite everything.

Even the internecine hostility I've decried is a sign that people care; if channelled right, even that could be productive. There is vast potential in this medium, but we aren't a tenth of the way toward realizing it. If we can hang on a little longer, and keep working, and start opening our eyes, I think we could really make something out of this graphic storytelling business.

That's kinda sorta my theme for this final column: Comics that are trying to push out the boundaries and make something fine out of this original American artform. There's some great stuff out there, and a lot of not-so-great stuff that at least points out some directions in which funnybooks might go. So check 'em out. Today's "Eww, this is weird" may be tomorrow's "That's where it all started."

And I've got some very unweird comics in here, too, comics that show how the mainstream itself can be explored and diversified to make comics better. I don't think the bright future of comics, if it ever comes, will emerge solely from marginal black-and-whites or solely from four-color super heroes. It's going to have to come from everywhere, from the whole field.

But I should shut up and let you get started on the reviews. If you've glanced ahead, you've probably noticed that this is one long mother of a column [*even cut in half!—KD*]. I figured if this is the last column I'm going to write, then I'd better make damn sure that I say everything I want to. And anyway, it gives you something to compliment me on. Should we happen to meet at the San Diego Con this year, and I ask, "What did you think of my reviews?," now you can say, "Boy, Gerry—that last one sure was long!"

So, as the early primates used to say, write if you get thumbs. And y'all keep readin' those comics now. I'll be checking up on you from time to time.

Bones #1. Written by Paul Ryan O'Connor, pencilled by Bryon Carson, inked by David Mowry; Malibu Comics; \$1.95.

This is keen stuff. It isn't what I thought of as "my kind of thing" (although I do have a fascination for living skeletons, especially as they appear in Mexican folk art), so I didn't really expect to like it. As it turns out, I love it. *Bones* is unique, funny, exciting, full of life, and visually very attractive.

The best way I've found to describe it to people is: You know

all those scenes in *Conan* and *Kull* and like that where the tomb robbers break into the old royal necropolis and a bunch of skeletons jump up and start chopping them down? Okay. Well, *Bones* tells you what those skeletons do when there weren't any tomb robbers around to cut up.

What they do, basically, is torment their friend Seymour. Seymour was the advisor to the King of the Myrillian Empire when he was alive. But after the king's death he was killed and entombed with his monarch and the royal honor guard, a rowdy bunch called "the boys." In the world of *Bones*, however, consciousness continues after death. "By the time I came to," Seymour recalls, "I had already begun to decompose. . . . By the time the last of my flesh rotted away, we'd fallen into a routine." Seymour, the king, and the boys go on playing court, as though they were still alive, occasionally tearing into the odd tomb robber, but gradually boredom gets the best of them.

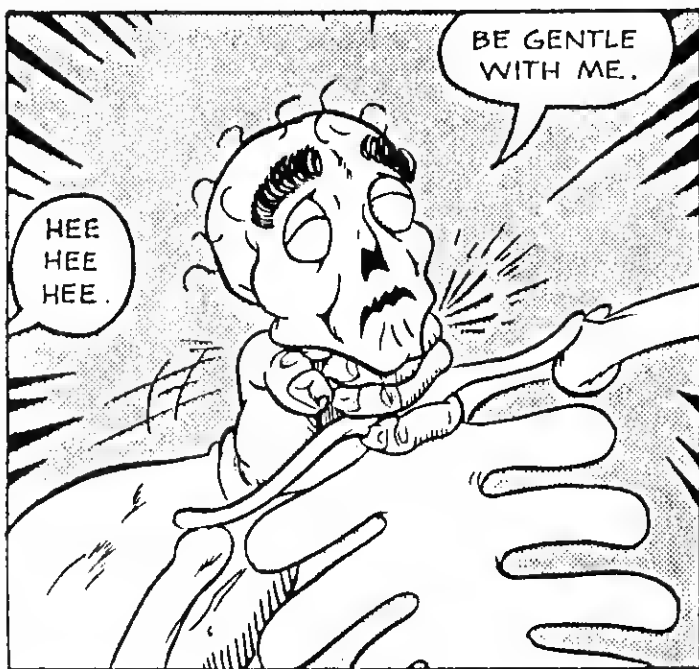
"A few months later," Seymour continues, "I woke to find that the boys had played a trick on me. Those rotten finks! They'd taken my feet. It took me three months of constant searching to find [them]." Later the boys form a band and use Seymour as a xylophone. They set up a bowling alley, with Seymour's head for a ball. "But the worst time,

by far, was when they took my hands away. I couldn't even write my bad poetry. It took me twenty years to recover my hands...twenty years during which I had to get by with the hands of three-toed sloth."

It's the voice of Seymour, with his irritated, strangely matter-of-fact retellings of what would seem to full-fleshed humans to be horrific assaults, that gives *Bones* its greatest charm. Paul Ryan O'Connor is that great rarity in comics, a writer who writes *funny*. He doesn't depend just on goofy situations for his humor, although he comes up with plenty of them. He makes the words themselves crackle with irony and absurdity. Seymour's pomposity and self-pity, the crass humor of the boys, the obscene stupidity of the trolls who enter the story later, are hilariously well realized. I don't think there's a single panel or balloon in this issue which is purely functional, which doesn't at least have some stylistic nuance to make it amusing.

O'Connor also doesn't overdo the wisecracks, like most comic book humor writers, but concentrates on telling his story and revealing his characters. When he does go for the gag, it's generally a good one. When one troll rejects the authority of another, we get the following argument: "Can't boss me." "Can too." "Can not." Troll Two then splits the skull of Troll One with an axe, tossing out a final, "Can too!," and ad-

Malibu Comics' *Bones* #1: "doesn't look like anything else, doesn't read like anything else."



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ding. "Haw! Marvin forgot me champion of debate team!"

Another joy is the art of Bryon Carson. I wouldn't have thought it possible to get so much personality and so much character into a fleshless skull. Seymour looks just the way he sounds: Befuddled, bemused, long-suffering, self-important and cowardly. The trolls are delightful creations too, with their huge rolls of fat and their Irish-drunk noses. And there are great little touches thrown into the background, like the two trolls fighting over a Cabbage Patch Kid (very satisfyingly jerking the hell out of its little arms and legs), or the troll King Tyrone decorating himself with strange little icons: a fallout shelter symbol, a peace sign, a heart, and something that almost looks like the Philippine flag.

Carson also creates a wonderful full-page image for the city of Myrill, a bizarre blending of Mexican pyramids, Mesopotamian ziggurats, classical temples, and an early 20th century office building. David Mowry has a clean, lovely touch with the inks (although maybe a little too fussy here and there) that helps make this a very pretty package.

I'm glad I climbed over my preconceptions and gave this very unusual comic a chance. I owe it all to a fellow critic, one whose opinion I respect very much, who scanned Malibu's promotional material at a recent gathering. While Malibu's publisher and editor and I waited with bated breath, the august reviewer weighed *Libby Ellis*, *Stealth Force*, *Dark Wolf*, *Bones*, and finally my own co-creation, *The Trouble with Girls*. And what was the critical verdict? Quoted in its entirety: "I like *Bones*." I think this shows, not only that even the finest critics can be complete boors, but that *Bones* is one of those comics that really stands out on the current comic book scene. It doesn't look like anything else, doesn't read like anything else, and works a delightful magic all its own.

(Of course, I think that's true of *The Trouble with Girls*, too, but what do I know?)

Floyd Farland, Citizen of the Future. By Chris Ware; Eclipse Books; \$2.95.

There's something strange about Texans. About Austin, Texans, anyway. I don't know what the cultural scene may be like in Houston, Dallas, or Lubbock. I don't know with what gifts San Antonio, El Paso, and Fort Worth

may have lately blessed our civilization. What transpires in the garretts of Waco, Amarillo, and Corpus Christi I may never know. But for the past quarter century Austin has been granting us some of the oddest artistic boons in our nation's history.

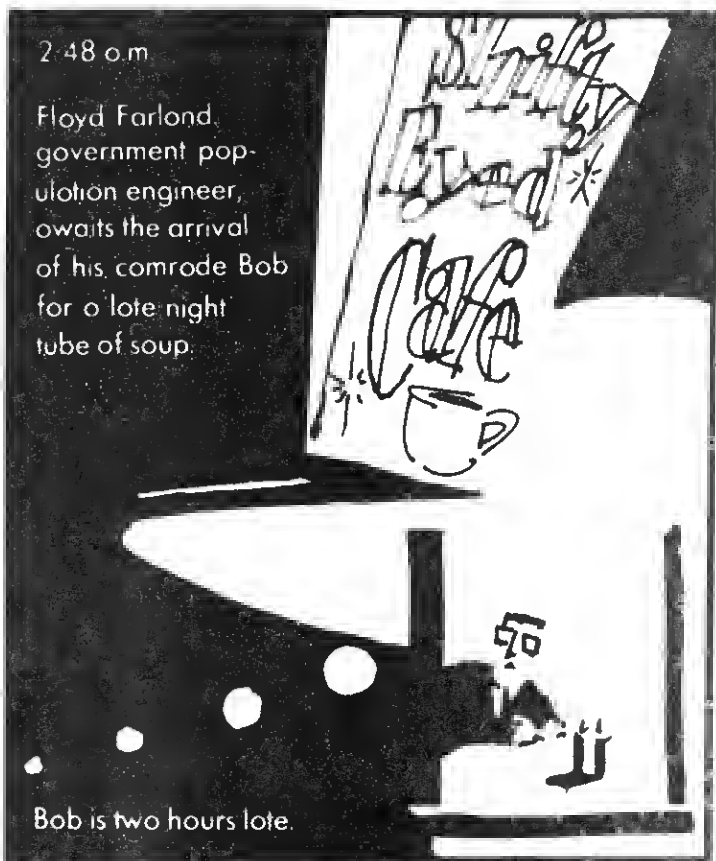
Back when the Fifties were turning into the Sixties some college boys named Gilbert Shelton, Frank Stack and Jack Jackson were working on a student humor magazine called *The Texas Ranger* together. Stack produced *The Adventures of Jesus* (under the pseudonym "Foolbert Sturgeon") which apparently helped inspire "Jaxon" to create *God Nose (Shot Reel)*, which has been called the first real underground comic book. Shelton, about the same time, developed his Wonder Wart Hog, one of the first well-known characters (later, after moving to this zany burg I live in, he gave us the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers). Those three cartoonists would be among the strongest and most consistent forces shaping the whole "comix" scene for years to come. Not what you'd expect from the University of Texas, is it?

The 1970s saw a strange music scene growing up in Austin. Among

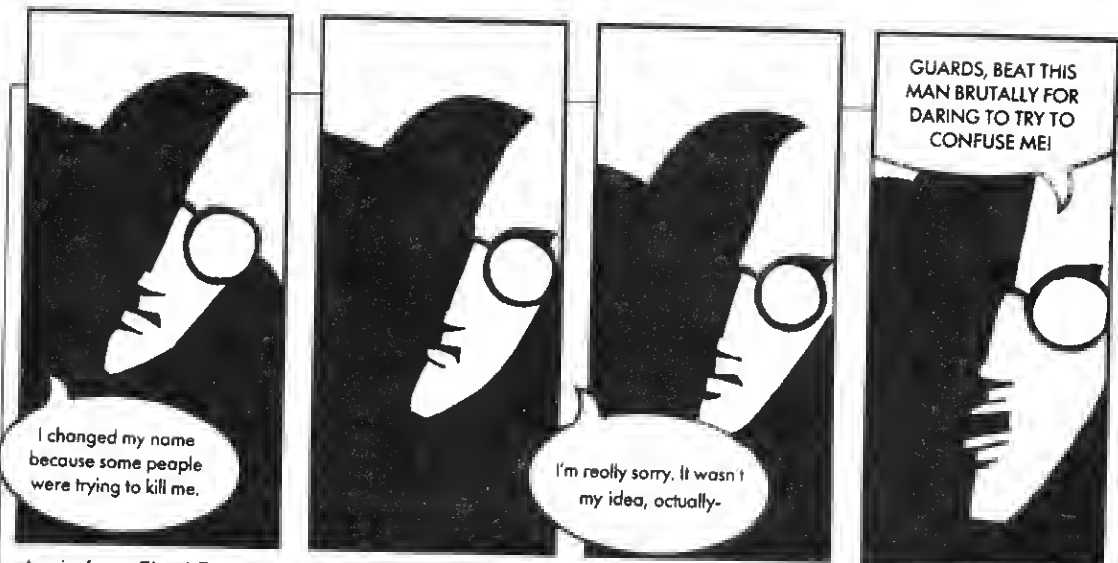
its products were the Dils, who combined old country/novelty song motifs with early rock sounds and a New Wave spirit to produce some of the liveliest and oddest sounds of the whole grassroots "new music" scene. Stuff like a New Wave version of "The Old Grandfather Clock." Under the name Rank and File they enjoyed a little national success. Now a new campus "art rock" upwelling has given us the Butthole Surfers, who are either conceptual artists masquerading as a bunch of ugly metalloid punks, or a bunch of ugly metalloid punks masquerading as conceptual artists. Either way, they could only come from Austin.

Maybe hanging around a genuine academic college in the middle of the Land of Football warps the creative imagination somehow. Maybe constantly explaining that "No, this isn't the same Colorado River that goes through the Grand Canyon" drives people crazy. Maybe looking up at that tower and remembering the honor student named Charles Whitman who once climbed up there with a rifle makes you question the validity of convention. Whatever the reason, weird stuff comes out of Austin. I gather

A bleak urban future with peculiar twists in Chris Ware's *Floyd Farland*.



Bob is two hours late.



Again from *Floyd Farland, Citizen of the Future*: Chris Ware's stark spaces into which our minds project the terrors stirred up by this paranoid vision.

that much of the Church of the SubGenius gang is Austin-centered, although it's hard to tell what's true and what isn't with them. Somebody told me that the Coen brothers, makers of the movies *Blood Simple* and *Raising Arizona*, are Austin boys, although I haven't been able to confirm it. All I can say is, if they're not, they ought to be.

And now comes *Floyd Farland, Citizen of the Future*, by Chris Ware. a student at, yes, the University of Texas in Austin. It's Austin stuff, all right. Weird, satirical, hard-edged, a little perverted. And very good. Funny, fresh, fascinating to look at, vibrating with creativity.

Ware sets his story in a bleak urban future, in some ways a typical comic book dystopia, but with some peculiar twists. "Technology and overpopulation have gripped the genitalia of society," we read. "By careful manipulation of all media, a sly totalitarian state is sable to make the common man think, do, or desire anything... Or so it supposes." While in most ugly comic book features the masses are pretty thoroughly enslaved and our story focusses on a single rebel or a small rebel group, in this case nearly everyone is resisting the state. "Organizing into rebel groups known as 'The Underground,' the 'common man' is ready to strike out at any moment.... That is, all except for the man known as Floyd Farland.... Floyd contents himself with his plastic way of life.... Floyd's mind has been washed away in a barrage of media deception and programmed innocence. Floyd is happy. And this is the story of his struggle."

By building his story around Floyd instead of some noble rebel, Ware takes us quickly into black

humor and absurdity. In a diner, a friend of Floyd's tries to get him to carry information to The Underground, whereupon the police appear and blow the friend's head off.... but all Floyd cares about is that his soup is congealed and his change is incorrect. Floyd is taken by the police, assumed to be a rebel, subjected to Operation Mindrape, rescued by The Underground, dragged back in a huge manhunt, and finally slated for execution. But through it all he will not change, staring emptily at us through his eyeless glasses, asking for processed cheese sandwiches, trying poignantly to explain the silly mix-up that's happened.

The power of the state is represented by cheesy ads, juxtapositions of '50s advertising art with disjointed slogans, like the Xerox collages in *The Book of the SubGenius*. Sometimes the ads appear out of nowhere to dominate a page, as if Eclipse had sold space for these bizarre products. "Even Mom likes it," proclaims one slogan, next to a clumsy picture of a grinning housewife with a spoonfull of goop. "Millions have tried Tastee brand Food paste and they say, 'Tastee-M-m-m.'" Adorning most of the ads is the smugly grinning face of Ed Granston, a sort of universal product spokesman; here he is "Ed Cranston—Noted Nutritionist," elsewhere he is "Ed Granston—Noted Golf Professional," somewhere else, "Ed Granston—Noted Television Entertainer." Granston is the bizarre *leit-motif* of Ware's world, a world in which "Kitchenware, artificial sweeteners, and income tax light the road to truth." He acts as a symbol of all the impersonality and artificiality of our consumer system,

the reassurances of experts we've never heard of, the purchase of our trust with counterfeit sincerity.

Ware tells his story with strange and powerful graphics. He cuts his pages up into tiny, claustrophobic cells: There are twelve panels on the first page, seventeen on the second, eighteen on the third, rarely fewer than that. Time is sliced into tiny fragments, freezing motion into suspenseful rigidity. Settings are forgotten in a brutally intimate independence on close-ups. The world is made of angular blots of light and dark, nothing soft, nothing refined, nothing inviting about it.

Ware uses remarkably little detail. Fans of fancy rendering won't find much here to gasp over. But he gives us everything we need. His severe, wood-block faces—lacking in features, sometimes even lacking outlines—are distinct and surprisingly expressive. In nearly every panel Ware gives us empty spaces, both black and white, into which our minds project the terrors stirred up by his paranoid vision. His designs are startling, constantly throwing us off-balance with their shifting viewpoints and nervous diagonal lines. At every turn, Ware uses his harsh minimalism to heighten the claustrophobia, the tension, the very black humor of his material.

This is a simple story, and contributes little new to the field of fictional social criticism. But it is a caustic piece of satirical writing and a triumph of eccentric graphics. Chris Ware has created a vision that is at once personal and universal, at once very cryptic and powerfully lucid.

And this guy is only 19 years old! Christ, what was I doing when I was 19? Probably still trying to convince myself that unstable molecules really

could keep the Human Torch's clothes on. It's spooky to think what this kid may mature into.

Obviously the mesquite ain't growin' on the artistic plains of the Lone Star State yet. Texas may be hell on women and horses, but it's still growin' some fine young artists.

Web of Spider-Man #31. J.M. DeMatteis, writer; Mike Zeck, penciller; Bob McLeod, inking; Jim Salicrup, editor; Marvel Comics, 75¢.

If there is one thing I have wobbled back and forth on considerably during my tenure here, it is my attitude toward the super-hero mainstream. Sometimes I'm convinced it's completely dead, so trapped by its own esoterica that it can only spiral into oblivion. And then a comic will come along to spark my interest, make me think the super-heroes are waking up again, at least until the novelty of whatever it is wears off. Then there are other times, when the summer nostalgia washes over me like a ripple in a tropical lagoon, when I seem to be able to settle back and plunge into the wacky adventures and nifty costumes, with only a skeleton of my critical faculties remaining.

This very stylish, very powerful, very intriguing new look at Spider-Man gives me an opportunity to consider all three reactions. First of all, DeMatteis has turned in a dazzling piece of writing and conception. He has made Kraven, the supreme hunter and near-immortal Russian aristocrat, a frighteningly huge and complex figure. He has even found a new depth in the overworked character of Spider-Man, establishing his own sense of being a fraud, a pose: "There is no Spider-Man. He's a mask. A myth. A lie. Oh sure, it'd be great if putting on a costume could miraculously change the man underneath. But it can't. I'm not Spider-Man. I'm just...Peter Parker." He tells a suspenseful story with an ending that sent chills up my spine. And he does it all with simple, elegant, and very imaginative scripting.

Zeck is nearly as effective. Lithe figures, stunning action, inventive narrative. With McLeod's atmospheric aid, he makes the misty sanctum of Kraven, the dark and rain-battered city, the drenched cemetery of the final scene truly horrific. This is strong meat. It's an eerie, troubling, but very slickly executed comic in the vein of the Miller *Daredevils* and *Watchmen*.

It also had its nostalgic appeal. Reading it, I remembered a night



Kraven the Hunter as an obsessed giant in the DeMatteis/Zeck/McLeod *Web of the Spider-Man* #31; a work that demands attention.

when I was twelve or thirteen and had first discovered that there had been such a thing as Ditko *Spider-Mans*, staying up half the night entraptured by my back-issues, reading the first appearance of Kraven twice because I thought it was the greatest thing ever written. DeMatteis, for all his reconstruction of the concept, is true to the Spider-Man I knew then. And he is true to Kraven even more. This obsessed giant, now laughing, now weeping over his apparent slaughter of the Web-Slinger, is a sophisticated rendering of the same Kraven I found so fascinating as a kid.

So this comic works for me, as an exciting new variation on super-heroes and as a return to a character I used to love. But that leaves my other point: The staleness and esoterica of the super-hero mainstream. Because, in an odd sort of way, even this excellent comic book epitomizes that problem.

In this maxi-series, "Moonshadow," DeMatteis was able to apply his talents and creative vision to a creation purely his own. In taking on a series, with twenty-four years of continuity developed through several different titles, he has to grapple with a lot of elements not his own, perhaps of little interest to him. He does a masterful job of reworking those elements to his own ends, but there is still a lot of old junk clunking around.

In one scene he tries to work the

phony rituals of a super-hero/super-villain conflict into Spider-Man's thoughts as he lies trapped in Kraven's net. "I know Kraven's method. (What's that he's got there?) He's just like Doc Ock and the Vulture and all the rest of 'em. (Looks like a rifle.) He's gonna pack me off to some secret hideout, spend a couple of hours ranting and raving—(A rifle?)—and while he does, I'll find a way to beat his smirking face right into the—(A rifle?!)" It's a clever scene, with Spider-Man's two levels of consciousness interplaying, and the unexpected twist on the "nefarious trap" situation. But it's also, perhaps of necessity, a self-conscious scene. DeMatteis winks at the reader, reminding him that this is a super-hero comic, full of all the silly conventions of such comics, and we can never completely escape that fact.

Marvel editor/writer Larry Hama makes a very pointed comment in a recent *Bullpen Bulletins* Pro File: "My pet peeves are: All fanzine writers over the age of fifteen. Tell me, does a sane person who wants to write for adults, choose comics as his or her medium? Give me a break!"

Well, speaking as someone who spent six months as a fanzine writer at the age of twenty-nine, I think he's right and he's wrong. Certainly I've wondered why I've taken the time to critique comics that are obviously

meant for teenage or preteen comic fans. I mean, they're not written for me, so I don't know that my standards are of any relevance. By the same token, would I write a book review of a children's book? If I did, I would have to bring different standards to it than I would to a grown-up book; I'd have to ask, "How is this as a book for kids?" (I made one effort in this column to review a comic book from a "targeted reader's" point of view, with an *Avengers* a few months back. It was an interesting exercise, very eye-opening; but, again, I have to wonder if such criticism really contributes anything either to younger or older readers.)

However, there certainly are comics aimed at adults. I can't vouch for the sanity of Chris Ware or the Hernandez Brothers or Art Spiegelman, but these are all mature and intelligent creators, obviously aiming at an adult readers, who have indeed chosen comics as their medium. The medium of comic books can do things that no other can, and those things are not solely the province of children. I don't believe J.M. DeMatteis intended "Moonshadow" for children, but he did choose a comic book as the way to tell it. And, for a critic of comics like "Moonshadow" and *Maus*, you certainly don't want a fifteen-year-old.

The tricky part comes with the in-between comics, the *Dark Knights*, the *Watchmens*, the *Web of Spider-Mans*. Here we have writers reworking the stuff of kids' entertainment, super-heroes, from largely adult sensibilities. The work still appeals to a lot of the twelve-and fifteen-year-olds, yet at the same time it grabs twenty-nine-year-olds,

thirty-nine-year-olds, and on up. Maybe it doesn't grab everybody, maybe it only grabs those of us who loved super-heroes when we were fourteen, but it does cut through grown-up critical faculties to excite a part of us that is not simply nostalgic.

With its gutsy themes, hard-hitting violence, emotional ambivalence and sophisticated writing, a comic book like *Web of Spider-Man* #31 demands adult critical attention. Yet it remains a super-hero comic, reworking the icons and the fantasies that excited us at puberty. This is the paradox of modern mainstream comics, the factor that makes them appeal so strongly to their committed audience but makes them so baffling to non-fans. They enable us to keep our youthful daydreams, they revive the thrill of our first discovery of these colorful heroes, yet they please our adult desires for artistry and surprise.

How do you judge a comic like this? Or should you even try? I like it, very much. It's extremely well done. It's a solid kick in the head, but what is it? "Moonshadow" was a fable of human enlightenment. *Greenberg the Vampire* was a darkly humorous exploration of psychological horror. But this, like most great new super-hero work, is an adult reworking of a children's story.

Comics have thus created something which, as far as I can see, is unknown in any other medium. Imagine Brian DePalma making a hard-punching, violent version of *The Wizard of Oz*. Image Elmore Leonard writing a lurid, cynical sequel to *Dr. Doolittle*. The only cases I can think of that even come close to these comics are Richard Adams's adult talking-animal novels.

Watership Down and *The Plague Dogs*, but those have a different intent and appeal. Stories like this one by DeMatteis and Zeck are an unprecedented blending of the juvenile and the adult.

That blending makes the work of the writer, the editor, and the critic very complicated. What is the purpose of these stories? Who are we aiming at? I keep thinking that if we can figure out why these comics appeal so strongly to us, figure out what we can do with them artistically and psychologically, we can bring super-heroes back to life as powerful archetypes.

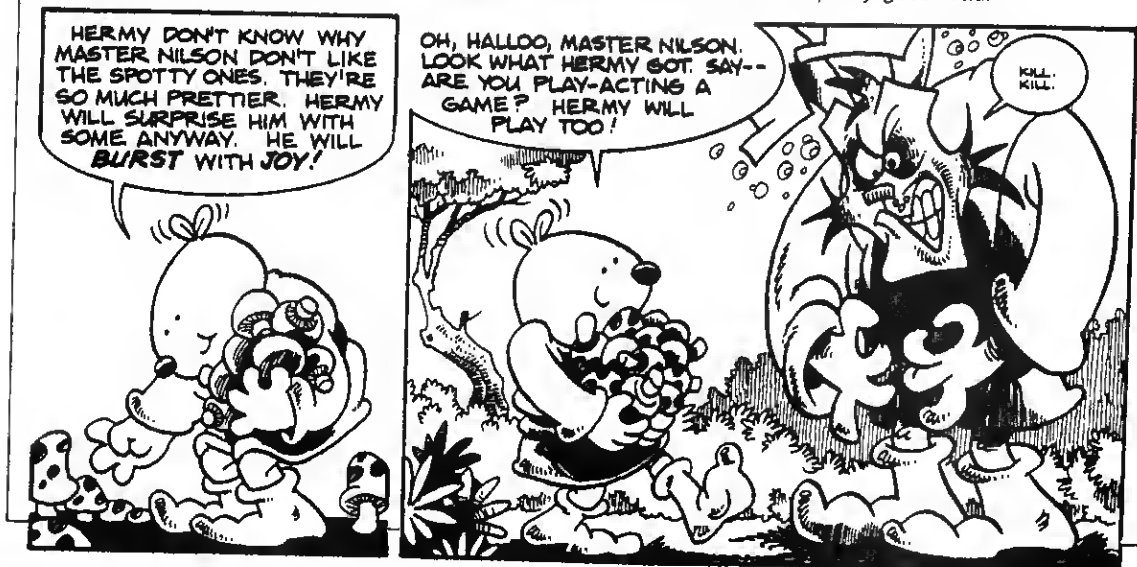
Until then...well, at least they give old farts like me something to write about.

Critters #16. Stories and art by Stan Sakai, Freddy Milton, and Steven A. Gallacci; edited by...lemme see, what was that gal's name? Oh yeah...Kim Thompson; Fantagraphics Books, \$2.00.

All right, all right. I've said a few curt, impatient things that seemed to dismiss Fantagraphics' talking animal line out of hand. Well, that wasn't right, was it? Because there is some good stuff going on there, amidst some things that aren't so good. And everything at least shows some individuality, a lot of sincerity, and a good level of craftsmanship. Certainly it's better than any other publisher's menagerie, if only because it springs from the true funny animal tradition, created by cartoonists who really want to do animal comics—you, won't find phony super-hero comics wearing animal skins here.

Critters is fun because it showcases so many different cartoonists. This issue features the three recurring stalwarts of the title, Sakai, Milton, and Gallacci (although this

Stan Sakai's "Nilson Groundthumper" vignette in *Critters* #16 makes for a "pretty good read."



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DAKIN —

STEVE
WAY —

PHIL
ELLIOTT —



Freddy Milton's warm, Carl Barks-like "Gnuff," again from *Critters* #16.

one's a little different because Sakai isn't doing his usual *Usagi Yojimbo*). Last issue gave us Gallacci, but instead of the other two we got Timothy Fuller, J.P. Morgan, R. Vezina and M.T. Gilbert. Other recent issues have included Mark Armstrong, Sam Kieth, Reed Waller and Kate Worley, Ty Templeton, Tom Stazer, Steve Lafler, Mike Kazaleh, J. Holland and Ron Wilber... basically everybody who's anybody in the talking animal subculture. And—although some of the guys seem to be running along too-similar lines, especially the ones inspired by old Warner Brothers and Jay Ward cartoons—it's remarkable to see how many different things can be done within the borders of "funny animal" comics.

I found this issue to be just a fair-to-middling one, although with *Critters* even that makes for a pretty good read. Stan Sakai seems to be playing a little Sergio Aragones riff, with the aid of a couple of old Bugs Bunny cartoons, with this tale of the medieval rabbit "Nilson Groundthumper" and his stupid assistant, Hermey. There are some funny gags and lively Aragones-like drawings, but I didn't feel it was as distinct or well-conceived as his lyrical *Usagi Yojimbo* work.

Freddy Milton's "Gnuff" was a warm little thing, the conclusion to a two-parter in which the female dragon Gnellie is separated from her beau by family hostilities, to meet him again years later after a lot of water has flowed under the bridge. Milton, with years of experience on European Disney comics, uses a very Carl Barks-like drawing style to tell some very different kinds of stories. They are quiet, often small in scope, with a gentle pace that I

found un compelling at first but find more pleasant with every episode I read.

My one real problem with this issue, and with many issues of *Critters*, is the installment of Gallacci's "Birthright." Although nicely done in many ways, I have simply never enjoyed one of these stories. Each episode is part of the long and complex saga of a band of animal freedom-fighters on a distant planet struggling to overthrow their oppressors. It's told "straight," not as humor, and drawn in a somewhat "realistic" style dominated by half tones and gray wash that seems to be trying to obscure whatever cartoony nature might be suggested by the animal subjects. The plot advances slowly, exclusively through dialogue and with nothing to help the new or forgetful reader catch up on past events. There are a number of characters, some of them distinguished by odd dialects, but they are restricted to such clipped, minimal speech that they never come alive for me.

Gallacci also does virtually nothing with the animal aspects of his characters. I'm not one of these who maintains that animals shouldn't be used to tell a serious story, but if an artist does choose to build his cast of humanoid critters, it seems to me he ought to do something more with their critterhood than just give them all distinctive heads. Even Barks and Milton, whose animals are essentially interchangeable with people in terms of behavior, do interesting things with their creatures visually and use their nonhumanness for cartoony humor and charm.

Between the space opera story-line, the minimal characterizations,

and the quiet gray art, I almost get the feeling Gallacci has found himself doing "anthropomorphics" by accident, and would really rather be telling a tale with humans. I wouldn't be so bothered by the troubles with one strip in *Critters* if it weren't the most regular of the features, and the one that seems to get the most enthusiastic fan mail. It seems as though even in the small audience willing to seek out black-and-white funny animal comics, most readers want the same old comic book stuff. I keep hoping that humor and cartooning can make a big comeback in comics one of these days, but even in the relatively friendly ground of *Critters* they're still at a disadvantage.

I'm happiest when *Critters* showcases some of the really bold, lively cartoonists who keep the heart of old funny animals alive in a contemporary body. Mark Armstrong contributed a Chuck Duck story to the Christmas issue (# 11) that was one of the funniest and freshest things I've seen in recent comics. Ty Templeton always comes in with something exciting and ingenious, like his brilliant "Dinosaurs at the Bar" in that same issue. Holland and Wilber's "Dragons" stories are always a fascinating blend of humor, oddity, and poignancy. I'll keep my eyes peeled for any of those.

I'm less crazy about the basic heavy-gag, wacky parody stuff like Timothy Fuller's *Blue Beagle* (a spoof of old super-heroes) and Tom Stazer's *Lionheart* (a sort of Bill Murray-ish reporter encountering supernatural weirdies). It's hard to pull off something that depends so much on gags and goofy situations, and sometimes these guys show their debts to Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, Jay Ward and other cartoon masters a little too clearly. But they do make entertaining reading, and they're doing something valuable just by trying to keep a great old tradition alive. (One such story that did strike me just right was J.P. Morgan's Fission Chicken adventure in Issue 15; you can boil it all down to "Super Chicken Kills the Care Bears," which was something I was very happy to see.)

Okay, so there's more in *Critters* that I don't like or can live without than there is that I really love. But that's how it often is with anthology comics, especially those willing to present a lot of different variations on the central theme. It's to *Critters'* credit that I can't make a blanket statement about the whole magazine. And there's enough good stuff here

that I certainly can't dismiss it the way I was trying to. I may never like an issue all the way through, but there'll always be something worth checking out. There are plenty of other comics I could never say that about.

Maus: A Survivor's Tale. By Art Spiegelman; Pantheon Books; \$8.95.

Oh, boy! More funny animals. Only these aren't so funny. Sometimes they are, but more often they're terrified, or angry, or clinging to hope in the face of almost incomprehensible horrors and indignities. In short, these animals very human. And that is the great strength and the great paradox of this singular comic book.

Spiegelman has achieved something truly remarkable here. Merely the fact that he was able to get a recent work of graphic storytelling—not yet legitimized by "classic" status—published by such a highly respected firm and so favorably noticed by the community of literary critics is in itself a miracle. And the work itself is fully deserving of such respect. Spiegelman has grappled with a potent subject, handled it at a personal level with great integrity, and made a rich and compelling story of it. The topic itself—the oppression and slaughter of Jews by the Nazis—evokes a powerful emotional response. Spiegelman has been able to preserve that basic power, even build upon it page after page, without once falling into sensationalism or cliché.

There is a dual narrative here. One is the story of Vladek Spiegelman, a dashing young textile magnate in pre-War Poland who is systematically stripped of property, of rights, and finally of liberty and the hope of life, when he is carted into Auschwitz. Running through this narrative is the story of his son, Art Spiegelman, interviewing his father in order to write this very book, finding himself drawn into his father's rocky marriage and a web of old guilts. The narratives play off one another to heighten the power of each: The arguments between Vladek and "Artie" gain in emotional force with every episode as we learn more of the horrors of the former's life; the Holocaust material grows sharper, more immediate, more stinging with every insight into its present-day legacy.

Spiegelman, a remarkably versatile cartoonist with a broad understanding of the uses of the medium, has chosen an effectively simple style of visual storytelling for *Maus*.



Mice relate the horrors of the holocaust: from Art Spiegelman's *Maus*.

The vast majority of his panels are either medium close-ups or "two-shots." When he does pull back for a longer view, it is usually for an establishing shot of a new setting or a crowd scene. Tight close-ups and full-body shots are very rare. There is little action within the panels, and scarcely any of the dramatic exaggeration which cartooning allows. His ink lines are thick, a little blurry, fairly uniform (I don't know from pens and brushes, so don't ask me about his technique), giving a rough-hewn and unfinished look to the pictures, suggesting ball-point pen sketches for the artist's personal reference.

All this conspired to make me find *Maus* somewhat uninteresting visually when I first flipped through it. But having read it now, I see how expertly Spiegelman has blended pictures and words for a highly effective graphic narrative. Spiegelman's writing is simple but powerful. The evocation of the older Vladek through his accented English is comical and endearing;

Spiegelman has managed to capture the peculiar, often-mimicked accent of native Yiddish speakers with never a false or stereotypical note. And when the young Vladek speaks, dignified and unaccented (for, we are to understand, he is speaking Polish or Yiddish in those scenes), it is a striking contrast, momentarily humbling us for chuckling at his funny English. I found myself reacting somewhat the same way to the unveiling of Vladek's personality and biography. Because he really is a pain-in-the-ass old man: Meddling, stubborn, miserly, cantankerous, dishing out the guilt. But as I followed his experiences in the POW camp, in the ghetto, and in flight from the Nazis, I saw planted the seeds of the anxiety and bitterness which would dominate his old age.

It is a very clipped, economical narrative, packing a huge wealth of incident and detail into its 159 pages. The pacing is forceful, unrelenting; from about the middle of the book on, beginning with the chapter called "The Noose Tightens," the

A potent subject handled on a personal level with integrity: again from *Maus*.



suspense becomes suffocating, yet there are beautiful, lyrical interludes that briefly calm the narrative drive and make Vladek's losses painfully poignant. On the eve of war Vladek places his nervous wife in a sanitarium, away from the cares of the world, where he can calm her and nurture her with his love. In this two-page sequence, which contains so much that it seems as though it must be much longer, Art Spiegelman's deceptively simple drawings and quietly human writing combine to weave a magic spell of the calm before the storm.

Yet I am still uneasy about one aspect of this work, and that is Spiegelman's choice to use mice, rather than humans, for protagonists. Animals are wonderful for allegory and satire, for stylizing and mythologizing the human experience. But that is not what is happening here. Spiegelman puts so much attention into historical and biographical detail, works so hard to recreate reality and tell Vladek's story with precision and sobriety, that his characters' mouse-heads seem out of place. When he first tackled this material, about fifteen years ago in the underground comics, he recounted Vladek's tale

as a bedtime story told to his son, about allegorical cats tormenting allegorical mice. In that explicitly mythical retelling, the use of animals had punch. Here, once we get the idea that the Jews look like mice, the Nazis like cats, and the Poles like pigs, the impact evaporates. In his earlier version of *Maus*, Spiegelman also used an appropriately stylized graphic style, in which the mice looked like mice, albeit cartoonily anthropomorphized. In the present version, both the mouse-heads and the fully human bodies are rendered with great realism, giving the sense of people with animal heads inexplicably grafted onto their necks. Because of the mouse-heads, there is a great sameness to the characters, as well; Spiegelman is too good a writer for this ever to result in our not knowing who is who, but it does tend to the blur the characters together, make them less distinct as individuals.

Overall, I wonder if *Maus* might not be still more effective than it is if it featured human-looking characters. But I'm not sure. There are moments when Spiegelman uses his animals to superb effect: When his Vladek walks through the streets, concealing his Jewishness and try-

ing to pass as a Pole, he is shown wearing a pig-mask over his mouse-face. It is a chilling representation of the cultural masks which Jews had to wear in order to survive. It is much more powerful than any verbal statement of the same idea could have been.

In the last analysis, maybe the species of the characters doesn't matter. I soon found myself forgetting that I was looking at mice as I became ensnared by the story of Vladek Spiegelman. This is a powerful work, but *quietly* powerful, not pyrotechnic and sensational. It is a comic book that begs to be compared to Real Books, to the works of Isaac Singer and not of Frank Miller. But apart from that, it is simply a comic book that will break your heart, that will chill your blood, that will make you see a dark chapter of the human story in a whole new light. ●

[Next issue: Part II of Gerard Jones's *Last Round-Up*, including Prime Cuts, Wild Dog, California Girls, Groo,—*unfortunately, no more reviews of his new company—but a definite warm-hearted, tear-jerking final speech (sniff!)*.—KD]

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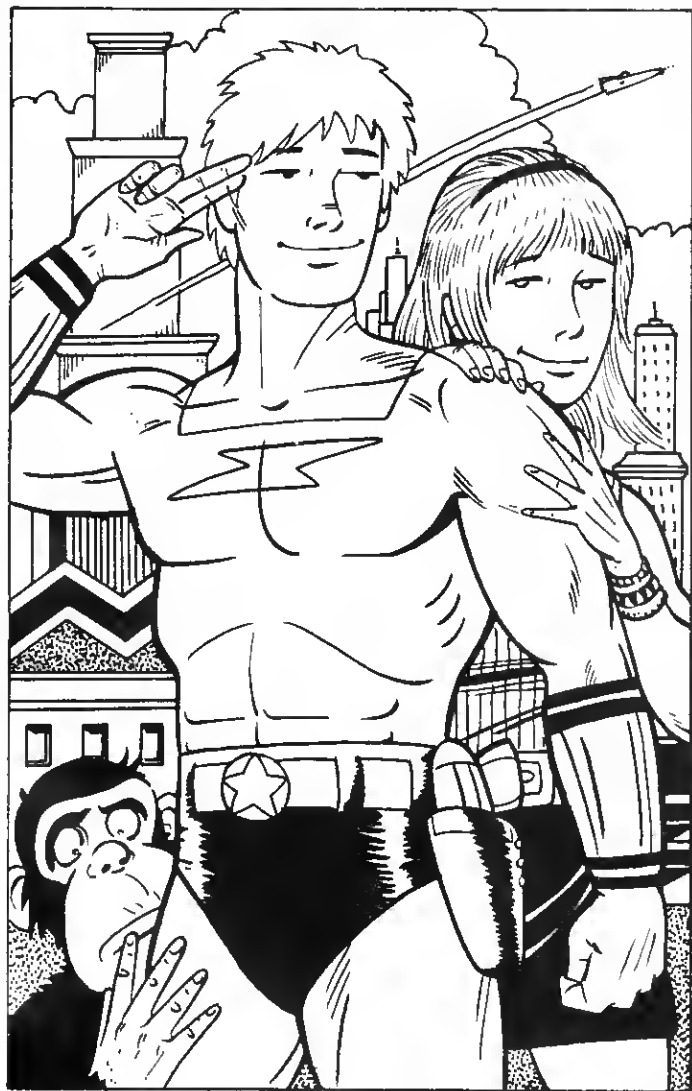
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AMAZING READERS



MARVIN PERRY MANN

A good portion of this column will be taken up with responses to the DC continuity article in AH #120, beginning with the author himself:

**BRIAN... ROB... BOB
BUSCH... HUGHES**
Merrimack, NH

Continuity Can Less

A few comments on my article on DC's new chronology are in order. First, thank you for running it. It's nice to see my name in print, or at least someone's name in print. But more on that later. The articles of mine that have appeared in *AH* so far might make me look like I belong to the "continuity" nut contingent. Well, I don't. I wrote the article solely to see if sense could be made out of the new DC Universe. Halfway through I discovered

that it couldn't. By then it was too late to stop. To put it bluntly, I cheated in several places. I'm not going to tell you where (though I'm sure somebody will). Most of the other chronologies I've read cheat, too, from George Olshevsky screaming "topical reference" every time he can't cram a Spider-Man story into the slot where it's got to fit, to Philip Jose Farmer's giving Tarzan three sons instead of one in *Tarzan Alive* in order to explain how Korak could be born in 1912 and then fight in World War I.

Why do fans do this I wonder? Why can't we leave well enough alone and just accept it that a series which has lasted fifty years and been written by three times that many people can't possibly form a coherent whole? It must be because it's fun to straighten it all out. That's what I kept trying to tell myself when I was trying to explain the Crisis from the Universe side, reading it over and over again, trying to figure out who knew what when. I felt like a congressional committee. I got a migraine that lasted for weeks and I still see spots in front of my eyes. After I mailed it, I broke out in a cold sweat every time I opened a new DC comic for fear that something in it would knock over my carefully constructed, though totally ephemeral, house of cards (literally, about 2000 index cards.) When Kim Thompson told me he was sending the article to Bob Greenberger for comment, I figured it was all over.

Mr. Greenberger was remarkably restrained however, and didn't jump on most of the points that I thought would be troublesome. Most importantly, he didn't catch any of the spots where I cheated. I do have some comments on his comments however.

I. Everybody who went back to the dawn of time remembers the multiverse, yet they never talk or think about it? I have several problems with this position. Let's start at the metaphysical level and work down. Can a character really be said to remember something if he is not allowed to refer to it, think about it, or react to it? Since, according to DC management, no references to the pre-Crisis multiverse are allowed, doesn't that, in fact, mean that it "never happened" and the characters don't "remember" it? I'm

not contending characters don't remember the Crisis, just the multiverse before it.

Since the Earth 1 characters don't remember Earth 1 (Superman doesn't remember being Superboy for example) and the remaining Earth 2 characters don't remember Earth 2 (because Brainwave altered their memories) if each did remember the multiverse what would they remember? Do the Earth 2 characters remember Earth 1 and vice versa?

Many of the characters Greenberger claims "remember" were not actually at the dawn of time. This includes the Suicide Squad and the Green Lantern Corps. In any case, this is irrelevant because time was changed again at the end of the *Legend of Wonder Woman* mini series, when Diana was reverted to clay and removed from history.

2. Bob Greenberger insists on preserving *Showcase* #56 as part of DC's continuity. This story shows Hourman getting married approximately one to two years after the JSA comes out of retirement. This means that Rick Tyler Jr., the new Hourman, is actually about six years old currently. Or is Greenberger trying to tell us that Rick is illegitimate? (Are you listening Roy?)

3. So Martian Manhunter is getting

a new origin? Fine and dandy. He's had three already. Someone should tell Steve Englehart to stop referring to *JLA* #144 in his GL stories though. Editors at DC apparently still don't talk to each other.

4. As far as Green Arrow's costume goes, who really cares whether he ever wore the original one? He is depicted in the *History of the DC Universe* wearing it, however, and no story has yet appeared which contradicts this. Of course the *History* also supports the current "post Crisis" J'Onn J'Onzz continuity which we are told is due to be changed.

I said above that I've been afraid to read DC comics since I wrote the article for fear one would knock the whole thing over. Well sure enough, *Who's Who Update* #2 presents a revised history of Batgirl that no chronology can support. This history indicates that Barbara Gordon moved to Gotham City at age thirteen, after "Batman: Year One." It also indicates that her career as a congresswoman is still considered part of the "continuity." Since one has to be 25 years old to be elected to Congress, and she completed her term some time ago, this would make "Batman: Year One" take place 17 years ago (at least) and Batman and Superman both 42 years old and Dick Grayson

29. If we adjust her chronology to fit the more standard ages applied to the other characters, Barbara ends up being adopted by Commissioner Gordon at the age of twenty. Since there's nothing we can do about the constitutional requirements for serving congress, Barbara cannot be less than 28 years old, which is rather old to call oneself "Batgirl." If I were DC, I'd dump the congresswoman part of her history and make her the same age as Dick.

Dick Grayson is also getting a new history, even though his revised "post Crisis" history has already been printed in *Secret Origins*, the book that was created, according to Dick Giordano, to sort out the post-Crisis universe. This brings us to another question. How many "revisions" will fans stand for? Already stories are contradicting post-Crisis chronology. Soon, it appears that the *Deluxe History of the DC Universe* meagre though it is, will be obsolete.

Previously, I stated that I didn't care for continuity from an artistic perspective. I like the new Superman, Batman, Wonder woman, et al. They are marked improvements over their predecessors. (I don't like the new origin of Jason Todd, but not because it destroys continuity, just because it's a lousy story). An editor, when given the choice of preserving continuity and printing a well thought out, artfully done story, should always choose the latter. However, there is also a commercial aspect to consider. DC's major competitor used the concept of continuity to create a legion of "zombies" who must have every issue of every magazine in order to follow the story. No matter that the essential secret of Marvel's continuity is that nothing ever happens. The illusion is maintained and the books sell. DC has made a conscious (or at least semi-conscious) decision to puncture that fiction. They are in danger of creating an atmosphere in which readers won't care whether they get a particular issue or not, because by the next one, those stories may not be part of the "continuity" anyway.

Marvel has received a lot of flak in these pages for their habit of arbitrarily bringing people back from the dead. This is thought to cheapen and blunt the impact of their stories. Although the methods they use are different, DC opens itself to the same charge by their constant revision of the past. Is there any real difference between the resurrection of Jean Grey and that of Diana Prince? In one she didn't



"really" die and in the other she never "really" lived. I am reminded of science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon's second law, "In a universe where anything can happen, who cares what does?" For DC's particular case, I would like to add a corollary "Can a universe which has no past, have a future?"

By the way, Fantagraphics has a few continuity problems of its own. In the credits I am listed as Brian Busch, Brian Hughes, and Rob Hughes. Who am I anyway? Did three parallel world versions of me collaborate on this article? I've worked on magazines in the past doing proofreading, typesetting, and paste up and I can understand how such a thing can happen, so I forgive you (this time. Just spell my name right on the check!), but you're lucky my name isn't Michael Fleisher.

• *Who?*

What do you do when an editor has the choice of doing a well thought out, artfully done story, which also radically alters continuity. These, I'm sure, are questions that turn editor's hair prematurely non-existent. For instance, the fact that there were three wrong names on the article didn't in any way detract from the number of letters we've gotten disagreeing with you. One voice should be of particular note:

BOB GREENBERGER

DC Comics
New York, NY

From the Offices...

Welcome to *Amazing Heroes*. With luck, your tenure will be both long and productive.

I want to thank the previous administration for thinking to send [Bob] Hughes's wonderful article, "Time: See What's Become of Me" in issue #120. However, as in all scholarly works, some errors cropped up and I want to take a moment to correct them.

The secret origin of Hourman was included in issue #16, not #47 of *Secret Origins*. While that book does work way ahead of schedule, that's a bit much.

I'm not sure how I missed this but the arrival of Kal-El and the death of the Waynes could not have occurred in 1952. That would make both Superman and Batman currently 35 years old. We tend to keep them

closer to thirty. Please adjust your calendars accordingly.

Dick Grayson did not enter Bruce Wayne's life until after the events recorded in "Batman: Year Two" transpired. It's more likely that Dick joined Bruce in very late 1977 or, more likely, early 1978.

Post-Crisis origins were provided for the Challengers of the Unknown and Deadman in *Secret Origins* numbers 12 and 15 respectively.

Speedy was a drug addict in *Green Lantern* #86, not 71. Also, the second series of Deadman lasted a mere four issues, not six. And, [Bob] continues to refer to a second series of Aquaman comics but there is, to my mind, a big distinction between his on-going run and the four-issue mini-series (to be complicated later this year by the Special).

To be real accurate, check the Dick Grayson leaves being Robin business more towards Terra joins the Titans. The Robin-Nightwing-Batman continuity glitch that

has everyone screaming gets clarified in *Batman* #420 so watch for it.

With the changes to the Martian mythos forthcoming, the creation of the "new" JLA listed in late 1986 will have to be revised. Somehow those four newcomers joined the team but that's up to Andy Helfer to explain.

• *When you say "keeping" Superman and Batman at about thirty does that mean we'll have to adjust our calendars every year? I find no problem with that. Yeah, why don't we just move the date of their birth up one year. Or better still: why do we give a real year for a hero's birth anyway? Just don't say when they were born, but have the inner continuity firm. The only inconsistency you might have is when one hero ages and another doesn't, i.e. Robin growing up and Batman staying 30. After all, it worked for Jack Benny.—KD (And I do apologize that your successful Suicide Squad*



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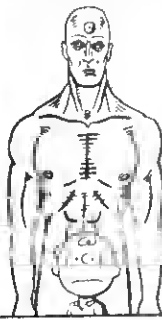
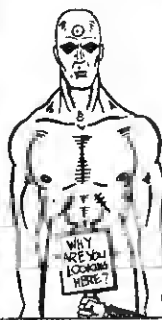
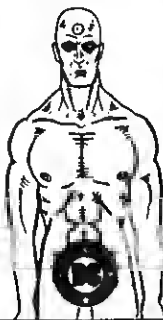
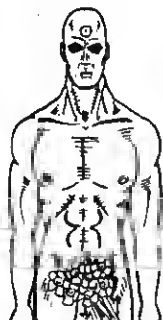
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DR. MANKATTAN HERE... THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF TALK LATELY ON HOW COMIC BOOKS SHOULD DEAL WITH SENSITIVE SUBJECTS...

IT IS MY OPINION THAT ANY STORY DEPICTING SEX, VIOLENCE, OR NUDDITY SHOULD STRIVE TO STAY WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF GOOD TASTE. TO THIS END, THE WRITER SHOULD ASK THESE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:...

IS WHAT YOU WANT TO SHOW ESSENTIAL TO THE STORY BEING TOLD? IS ITS DEPICTION PROPORTIONAL TO ITS IMPORTANCE? AND, MOST OF ALL, WHO IS YOUR INTENDED AUDIENCE? REMEMBER TO NEVER UNDER-ESTIMATE YOUR READERS!

IF YOU TAKE EXTREME STEPS TO CENSOR ASPECTS THAT YOUR READERS CAN PERFECTLY ACCEPT, YOU RISK INSULTING THEIR INTELLIGENCE AND ALIENATING THEM FROM YOUR WORK! JUST SOME THOUGHTS ON A COMPLICATED ISSUE I WANTED TO SHARE. THANK YOU.



was left out of the Amazing Heroes Preview Special. If it makes you feel any better, also omitted was our successful Usagi Yojimbo. Don't know how it happened. I'm marking it down to my novice status. Hope you do as well.—Humble KD)

And now, another voice from the home front...

ROY THOMAS

Creeping Errors

This morning I belatedly got around to reading [Bob] Hughes' "Time: See What's Become of Me." A generally helpful and much-appreciated piece of work... but because no copy of the article was sent me prior to publication, a small number of errors crept in. In some areas, I should know if anyone does, right?

Here's a brief listing:

(1) Might've been better to list Dr. Occult (1935—see *Secret Origins* #17) and Zatara (1938—see upcoming *S.O.* issue), if only because they're in the All-Star Squadron. Not an error as such, but their inclusion would have aided the continuity-confused.

(2) Jay Garrick became The Flash in 1939, not 1940. (*Flash* #1 was cover-dated January 1940, but the events covered happened a bit earlier. His ten-year class reunion occurred in *All-Star* #50, Dec. 1949-Jan. 1950. Sure, I could've fudged a bit timewise, as I did in the Crimson Avenger origin, but I generally prefer not to do so.)

(3) Hard to understand how Hughes could have left out Dr. Fate, even after his origin was revamped in the

recent mini-series so that he now aged years in a very short period of time. He still first appeared in continuity in 1940, as per *All-Star Squadron* #47 (and upcoming *Secret Origins* #24), and was a charter member of the Justice Society in November of that year.

(4) The Seven Soldiers of Victory, as they are still primarily called, did indeed have a seventh member in this post-Crisis, post--original-Green-Arrow-and-Speedy continuity... but he was definitely *not* Stuff the Chinatown Kid, who didn't pop up till later and who never appeared in a single issue of *Leading Comics*. Hope Hughes didn't get that particular bit of misinformation from anyone at DC. Rather, the Seven Soldiers were the Star-Spangled Kid, Stripesy, Crimson Avenger, Wing, the Shining Knight, Vigilante, and Billy Gunn, the westerner who aided the Vigilante in most of his *Leading Comics* chapters. See upcoming issues of *Young All-Stars*; Billy's already appeared briefly in #56.

(5) In 1951 (not 1952—see *Secret Origins Annual* #1, as well as his debut in *Strange Adventures* #9), Captain Comet went public—but, as the article states, he obviously did keep a low profile. Wouldn't you, after what had happened very early that year to the JSA? As to whether he left earth in 1953—well, maybe.

(6) I don't know about other DC heroes whose birthdates are given in Hughes' piece, but I wouldn't get too attached to those of the members of *Infinity, Inc.*, if I were you. The Infinitors will not be aging according to those birthdates in future issues. Besides, since even the founding date of *Infinity* has evidently been altered (as I learned only by reading Hughes' article, keeping the birthdates the same would be the

height of silliness. I deliberately obscured Hector (Silver Scarab) Hall's birthdate on his tombstone in *Infinity, Inc.* #44, for instance).

(7) Not quite sure about the *tsuris* concerning Hourman under the "1966" heading. Rex Tyler and Wendi Harris were married in 1965, and Rick Tyler could very well have been born in 1966 (though see note (6) above). I'd be interested to learn exactly why Hughes thinks this must have been Hourman's second marriage. Maybe it was. Bob Greenberger's footnote to the contrary. We'll see.

A final note: Funny. It used to be that when a new and overly confident writer and/or editor took over a book, he'd want to change the hero's costume or *modus vivendi*. Nowadays he wants to change the hero's *origin*! (I felt bad enough doing same to Captain Marvel and Family, and consoled myself with the fact that at least they had never really been a part of DC's major former universe, Earth-One.)

Still, many of the changes being wrought at DC make good sense from a commercial and even aesthetic point of view. I simply believe it would be far better for DC (and for the reader's combined sanity and sense of wonder) that virtually all post-Crisis occurrences in DC comics be counted as "real" for the foreseeable future.

That point of view isn't being "anal retentive," folks, to use the word that the otherwise venerable Max Collins in particular has been getting a lot of mileage out of lately. It's only common sense, in an industry which would prefer that its audience stick around loyally for decades instead of only a few formative years.

After all, if comics readers get the idea that a company and its creative

personnel don't count as true what happened only *yesterday* in its magazines, how can those same readers be expected to take seriously what happens *today*—since they'll suspect it may well be discounted *tomorrow*.

Whether the view is true or not, the company is liable to be considered as simply chasing after new readers and not treating its longtime (read: several years) readers with respect.

This is true whether the company is DC, Marvel, or the latest overly proud "independent."

● *Can you imagine what would've happened if we'd submitted that article to every concerned DC editor!? Something about too many cooks... Sincerely, thanks for your input, Roy. Any other editors who wanna have their say: write in. —KD*

And now, from the fan side...

DAN SULLIVAN
Winterpark, FL

A Better Idea

In regards to a comment made on page 50 of issue #120, I have a better explanation.

First, in regards to Wonder Woman, the Gods of Olympus did not remove her from the time stream. As explained in the *Legend of Wonder Woman*, the multiverses Amazon Princess did not belong in this new universe. They were simply holding her "Earth-One" reality in place until her part in the Crisis was over. They then allowed the actual history of the new Earth to resume. This holding of reality allowed her to exist, as well as Earth-One's Luthor.

In regards to the Marvel Family, they continued to exist due to Mekanique's holding back of the Crisis in 1942. When she allowed the effects of the Crisis to take hold, that is when the Marvel Family ceased to exist. This occurred "simultaneously" with what the Olympian gods did.

This means that post-Crisis history was still actually happening, but it was superseded for a time by the "holding" effects. Thus, in looking back with a post-Crisis view, it would have been "Iron" Munro who, with the aid of Superboy, punched the Anti-Monitor into the Sun of Qward.

I also agree with you that no one



MISTER

but Spectre, Dr. Fate, and Shazam remember the Multiverse. Those memories were wiped out at the end of the "hold" effect.

● *It would be nice for DC if no one at all, including fans, would remember the Multiverse. But because it has been wiped from memory, does not mean it didn't happen, because someone died and no one knows they lived, does not mean they didn't live, just because no one hears it, does not mean a tree did not fall. —KD*

WILLIAM RUDD
St. Clair Shores, MI

Superboy Cliffhanger

I have been reading comic books for 20 years now. I have followed the ups and downs of the comic industry but nothing has upset me more than

the recent Superboy story in *Legion of Super-Heroes* and *Superman*.

This story was the vilest piece of cow flop I have ever read [Ah, more intelligent criticism.—KD]. I just can't imagine [I'm sure you can't.—KD] what the people were thinking of that were responsible for this. Were they just sitting around one day and said "let's bring Superboy back and then kill him off right away?"

This wasn't even a one shot deal. The story line wound in and around several issues and really had me excited that the Superboy I always knew was back. It seemed that he was back to stay. I'm sure that's what the naive readers were expected to believe. Instead he is killed off. Just think, no one in the Superman family was even hurt for 45 years [See "Mortality and the Man of Steel" Amazing Heroes #122] and now Supergirl and Superboy both get killed within 12 months.

The story itself has so many holes it looks like a Swiss cheese [A Swiss cheese what?—KD]. The Time

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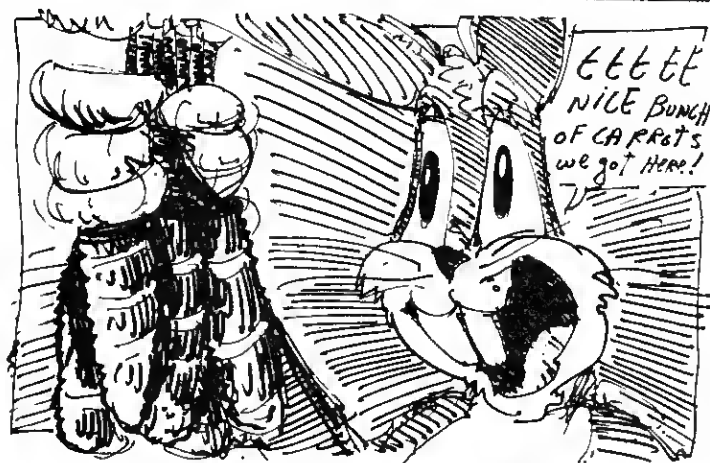
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Trapper says at one point he would like all the time lines to end. Well okay that sounds stupid but if that's what he wanted why did he *save* Superboy's universe in the first place? Why not let it be destroyed then help the Anti-Monitor destroy what was left? And how did he pull the neat trick of changing the history of the world the Legion is in to that of the world Supeboy was from? At some point the whole history of the world and the Universe was changed so that the Legion would think they were from the same Earth as Superboy. That was to be the most contrived, weakest, lamest theory I've heard yet. And after all the whoppers that were told because of the Crisis that is saying a lot.

And some heroes Mon-el and Ultra Boy turned out to be. The pussies. Their friend is killing himself and they make a half-ass effort to help only to get blown away by some "super-breath." Great. I knew Mon-el was gutless but I always thought Ultra Boy was better than that. Brainiac was his useless self. The guy is supposed to be a great thinker but I guess the story confused even his fantastic mind. If the Time Trapper could really control where the time bubble went, why mess around with Superboy? Just have the bubble appear 2 seconds before the Anti-Matter wave reaches it.

Look I was upset when I was told Supergirl and the Flash were dead, and Superboy and the multiple Earths never really existed. I was upset but I reserved judgement until I saw the DC Universe after things settled down. But to bring back a character like Superboy for a few issues only to kill him off? Boy I was mad that Krypto was brought back only to be turned into a regular dog. (Tell me again he really thought

he could carry Gold Kryptonite in his mouth) Krypto turned out to be small potatoes. Superboy himself was the next to go. If I was dead, this would make me turn over in my grave [Readers fill in appropriate remark here.—KD].

I used to laugh when I read letters printed in your book from someone who was really upset about something. It's just a comic book I thought, what difference does it make? The thing about this was that I feel I was lied to. To bring back Superboy and then destroy him is very dishonest. This is completely different from Flash or Supergirl. This is a character who was completely out of the picture. One Superboy did exist but he was off in La-La Land with the original Superman. The Superboy from the Legions past didn't exist and in fact never existed. Not content with that some bimbo or bimbos [Bimbii?—KD] decided they should explain how this could be. But why did killing Superboy become necessary? It makes no sense.

Just tell me who is responsible for this so if I'm ever walking along and see them hanging on to the edge of a cliff I can stomp on their fingers.

● *That's just what the congressional investigation committee said to Ollie North.* —KD

PETER GARCIA
Puerto Rico

Psychopathic Suggester

How about doing an article on comics' 10 most psychopathic superheroes like Batman, Solomon Kane, Punisher, Spectre, Daredevil, Wolverine, etc., and the 10 most

psychopathic villains: Joker, Hobgoblin, and others. How about the silly origin of The Whisper (though all heroes' origins are silly in one way or another). But The Whisper had latent mutant genes. His "x-factor" genes save him from death when the Cobra poison and Mongoose blood transfusion, which would have killed anyone else, mutate Bob Frank instead. That's why most super-heroes have survived radiation, deadly chemicals, etc., because their mutant chromosome save them at the right time.

How about some Hero History articles on Kid Colt, Two-Gun Kid, Avengers, Daredevil, Fantastic Four, Red Sonja, The Defenders, and an interview with the people of New World Pictures who now own Marvel and their plans to bring the heroes to the movies.

● *Never thought of Daredevil as psychopathic, but how about just Psychopathic Comics! Better still, how about an article about 10 most psychopathic comics' creators. No, we've already had too much trouble in that regard.*

Seriously, Peter, you write to us so often, and as I mentioned previously, I'd like to print more of your letters, but your penmanship ... Please PRINT.

ATTENTION WRITERS! As you can see, Peter likes suggesting articles for Hero Histories. Below is a list of some of those he suggested, those which I'd consider. QUERY FIRST! Submissions MUST be typed, double-spaced, and include an SASE. The article should have a checklist of character appearances, which could probably be



obtained from Don Rosa (see his address at the top of the Information Center on the second to last page of this issue).

Hero Histories should not be an issue-by-issue recitation of a character's adventures. There should be an analysis of why they are the way they are, are they a good hero/villain, so-so, poor, perhaps as Peter did, a comment on the plausibility of their origin; have they gone through many changes; maybe which writer and artist handled the character better; have there been any contradictions; and a conclusion!

I get so many articles just citing a character's adventures and no final statement of a) the potential future for the character, i.e. if they're not currently in a comic, should they be revived and why, b) was the character a total loss, and why c) perhaps even calling up the people who are working on the character, if he/she are still active/alive. In other words, you gotta work. This issue's "The Ace of Knaves" by Virginia Pennick is a good example of what I mean. Now, to those suggestions (those marked by * I am more interested in):

Sons of the Tiger, Nuklo*, Spider Woman (with preview of new series?), Rip Hunter—Tine Master*, Lilith, Satana, (these last two combined in an all-daughter article?), Living Mummy*, Inhumans, Team America, Ghost Rider* (all versions—categorized in last issue's

Information Center), all versions of the Vigilante (Peter cites 5!?), Killraven, Zombie, the Golem, It*, Werewolf by Night (Peter's requested him 4 times, maybe for October?), Guardians of the Galaxy, The Dark... I mean, Black Knight, Star Hawkins*,

Star Lord*. There were a lot more he suggested, including most of the biggies, but let's leave it here and go on to...

Other suggestions: comparisons of the Atlantis of Aquaman, Lori Lemaris, and the Sub-Mariner (others?); people with similar powers: stretching, super-speed, fire; hidden races: Inhumans, Eternals; the Space Museum: Stories*, TV show comics* (Dell, Gold Key, the unique ones, perhaps a 10 Best?), and speaking of X of a Kind:

10 alien races: best, weirdest, stupidest; 10 real people who had their own comic, i.e. Jerry Lewis, Bob Hope; 10 best mystery stories (where an actual mystery was solved as opposed to a super-villain fought); 10 best ghost stories; 10 stories with religious themes (crazed preachers, hero being helped by angel, as opposed to Xmas stories); 10 Xmas stories; 10 similar stories (hero with amnesia, hero blind, city turning against hero, etc. a subject for a future article by yours truly); 10 wedding stories (perfect for next June); 10 times a hero must act in civilian identity. Now we're gettin' too durned obscure, so let's stop.

And don't forget "Amazing Readers," where the good, the bad, and the ugly meet—and you all know who you are.

—KD



GARY KNAPISZ





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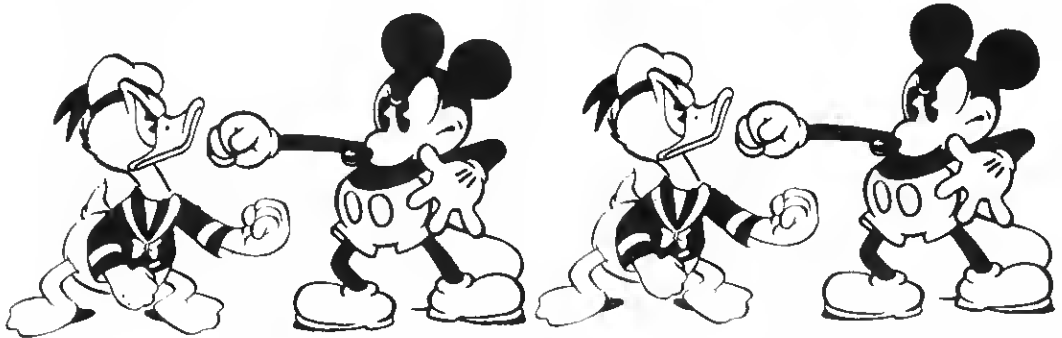
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DON ROSA'S INFORMATION CENTER

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● **How many covers of *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories* did Mickey Mouse appear on as opposed to Donald Duck?**

You mean *without* Donald? Donald appeared on every issue of *WDC&S* since #1 except for three: #5 (Goofy), #8 (Clarabelle Cow) and #305 (Mickey). Mickey appeared on a number of covers *with* Donald drawn by Walt Kelly, then there were many years of strictly Donald covers until Gold Key took over publishing and changed all the old rules for cover-features. Still, Donald appeared at least as an inset on all the issues from then on except #305.

But here are the covers which featured Mickey (not counting that one Carl Barks cover on #321 which showed Donald reading a Mickey Mouse comic): #33, 41, 49, 58, 75, 97, 248, 264-275, 277-287, 296, 299, 300, 305, 308, 310, 343, 344, 371, 380, 383, 387, 400 & 447; Mickey will be featured with Donald on the new Gladstone issues of *WDC&S* from #519 on. I confess I could not check issues #480-510 because I don't own copies—I'd appreciate hearing from anyone who knows where I could *buy* copies of those issues to fill out my set since beginning with #523 someone whose work I've always closely followed will be writing and drawing the lead feature.

● **Were all the Mickey Mouse serials in *WDC&S* either redrawn versions of Gottfredson or by Paul Murry? How about running a list of the serial titles and issues?**

Yes, from *WDC&S* #1-100 the Mickey serials were edited reprints of Gottfredson newspaper strips. And after that began redrawn versions of Mr. G's strips by various artists (Dick Moore being one), but weren't *all* rewrites. Paul Murry took over the writing & drawing on the serials beginning with #152 and did a number of rewrites of old stories himself. Murry wrote and drew all of the Mickey serials until they ended in #392 *except* #155-157 (Moore), #327-329 (Tony Strobl) and #348-350 (Jack Manning). Here is a list

of the Mickey Mouse Adventure Serials as appearing in *Walt Disney's Comics And Stories*... (MM equals "Mickey Mouse")

MM on Sky Island (#1-2)
MM & the Ostrich Race (#1-2)
MM & the Seven Ghosts (#3-4)
MM in search of Jungle Treasure (#4-5)
MM as His Royal Highness (#6-9)
MM in the Secret Service (#7-10)
MM in Adventures with Robin Hood (#11-12)
MM & the Miracle Master (#18-21)
An Education for Thursday (#22-24)
MM & the Bar-None Ranch (#25-29)
Bellhop Detective (#30-35)
Love Trouble (#36-39)
MM in the Land of Long Ago (#40-44)
MM on a Secret Mission (#45-48)
MM & the War Orphans (#49-50)
MM & the Lectro Box (#51-55)
MM & the Black Crow Mystery (#56-60)
Billy the Mouse (#63-66)
The Professor's Experiment (#67-68)
MM in the World of Tomorrow (#69-71)
MM & the House of Mystery (#72-74)
MM & the Isle of Death (#78-80)
The Jewel Robbery (#81-85)
Super Salesman (#91-92)
MM Outwits the Phantom Blot! (#101-106)
MM in the House of 7 Haunts (#107-111)
The Mystery at Hidden River (#112-116)
The Monarch of Medioka (#117-122)
The Mighty Whale Hunter (#123-128)
The Ghost of Man-Eater (#129-132)
The Mystery of the Robot Army (#133-136)
The Shattered Glass Mystery (#137-140)
The Mysterious Pill Plot (#141-145)
The Miracle Master (#146-151)
The Last Resort (#152-154) (First Murry)
The Secret of the Whirlpool (#155-157)
The Lens Hunters (#158-160)

The Case of the Vanishing Bandit (#161-163)
 The Mysterious Crystal Ball (#164-166)
 The Lost Legion (#167-169)
 The Magic Rope (#170-172)
 Ridin' the Rails (#173-175)
 The Lost City (#176-178)
 Yesterday Ranch (#179-181)
 The Marvelous Magnet (#182-184)
 The Vanishing Railroad (#185-187)
 The Case of the Hungry Ghost (#188-190)
 The Pirates of Tobasco bay (#191-193)
 The Great Stamp Hunt (#194-196)
 The Legend of Loon Lake (#197-199)
 The Phantom Fires (#200-202)
 The Crystal Ball Quest (#203-204)
 The Sunken City (#205-207)
 The Mystery of Lonely Valley (#208-210)
 The Castaways of Whale Bay (#211-213)
 The Idol of Moaning Island (#214-216)
 The Threat of the Stone-Eaters (#217-219)
 The Monster of Sawtooth Mountains (#220-222)
 Alaskan Adventure (#223-225)
 The Fantastic Fog (#226-228)
 The Bar-None Ranch (#229-233)
 Pineapple Poachers (#234-236)
 An Education for Thursday (#237-241)
 The Trail to Treasure (#242)
 Mickey's Strange Mission (#243-245)
 The Moon-Blot Plot (#246-248)
 The Golden Touch (#249-251)
 The Great Giveaway Mystery (#252-254)
 The Mystery of Misery Mesa (#255-257)
 The Missing Merchantman (#258-260)
 The Incredible Box Top Plot (#261-163)
 The Treasure of El Dorado (#264-266)
 Secret of the Ancient Incas (#274-276)
 Undercover Mountie (#277-279)
 MM & Goofy's Mechanical Wizard (edited Reprint from *Four Color* #401) (280-282)
 The Return of the Phantom Blot (#290-292)
 The Phantom Ship (#290-292)
 The Pirate's Den (More reprints) (#293-294)
 The Medicine Man Mystery (#295)
 Trapped on Wrecker's Reef (#296-298)
 The Treasure of Oomba Loomba (#313-316)
 The Red Wasp Mystery (#317-319)
 Lair of the Zoomby (#320-322)
 Trapped in Time (#323-326)
 Mystery of the Wicki-Wacki Wot-Not (#327-329)
 The Case of the Dazzling Hoo-Doo (#330-332)
 Peril at Panther Pass (#333-335)
 MM & the River Pirates (#336-338)
 The Strange Case of Prof. Zero (#339-341)
 The Secret of Shipnapper's Cove (#342-344)
 The Sinking City (#345-347)
 The Secret of the Black Box Castle (#348-350)
 The Sorcerer of Donny Brook Castle (#351-353)
 Chief Bigfoot & the Ghost Warriors (#354-355)
 Journey to No-No Land (#356-358)
 The Sign of the Scorpion (#359-361)
 Mystery of the Counterfeit Masters (#362-364)
 Kingdom in the Clouds (#365-367)
 The Viking Stone Mystery (#365-367)
 The Haunted Hanadoom (#372)
 The Pirates of Port Placid (#373-375)
 The Golden Helmet (#376-377)
 Message in a Nutshell (#378-380)
 The Mystery Monster from Smoggy Bog (#381-383)
 The Old Pirate's Mansion (#384-386)
 The Case of the Talking Tooth (#387-389)
 Flight of the Dragon (#390-392)

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